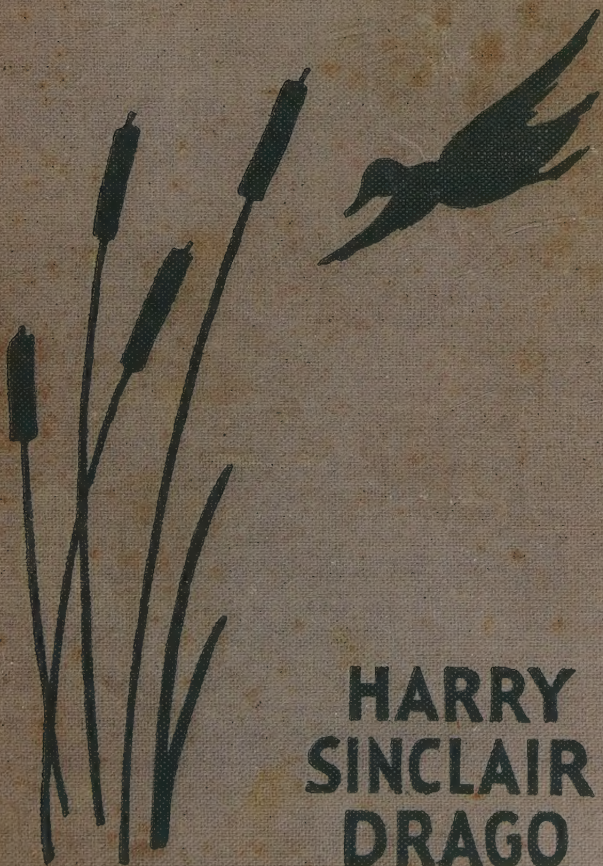


WHERE THE LOON CALLS

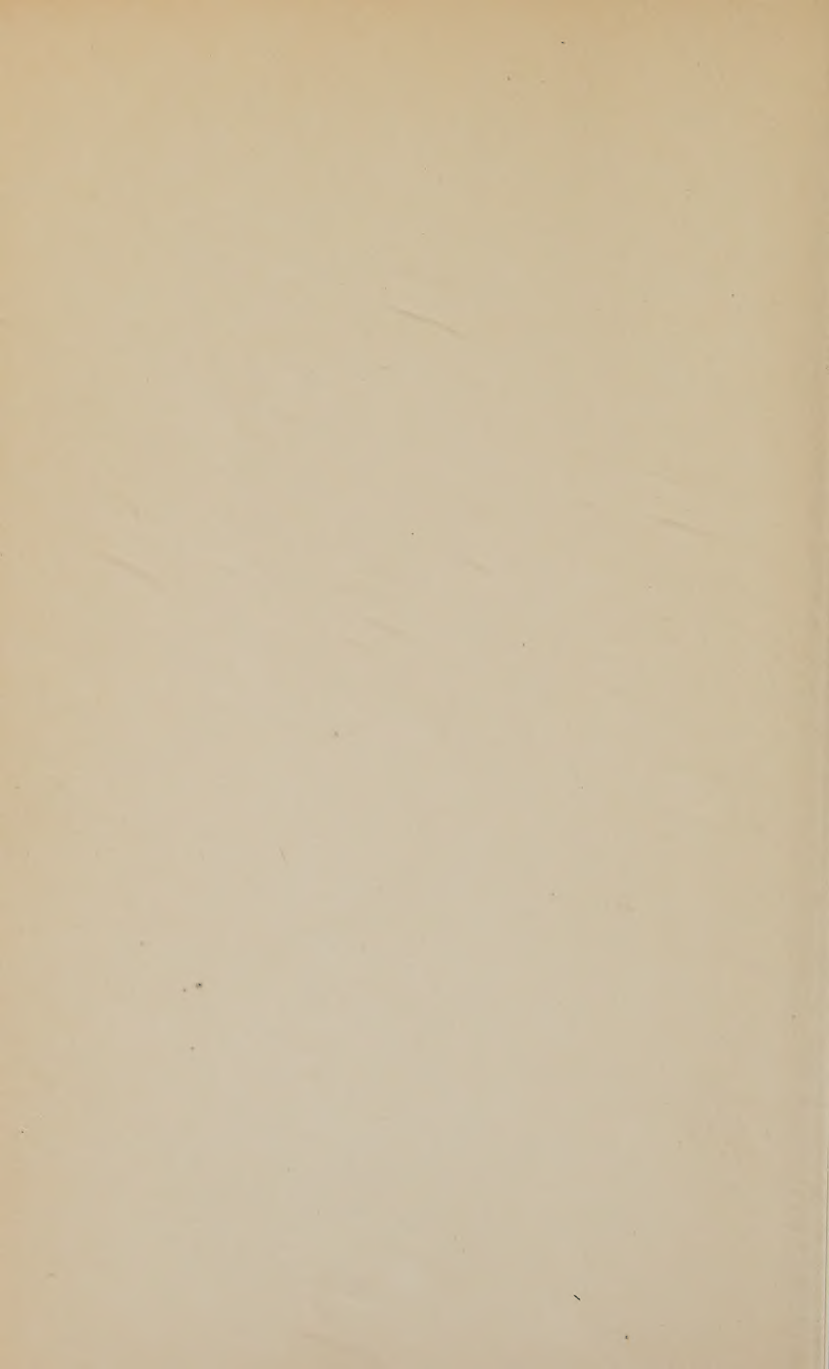


HARRY
SINCLAIR
DRAGO

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WHERE THE LOON CALLS

WHERE THE LOON CALLS

BY
HARRY SINCLAIR DRAGO

AUTHOR OF
"FOLLOWING THE GRASS," ETC.



NEW YORK
THE MACAULAY COMPANY

THE CHARACTERS OF THIS
NOVEL ARE IMAGINARY AND
ARE NOT PORTRAITS OF ANY
LIVING PERSONS . . .

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To
THE MEMORY OF
SAMUEL J. DRAGO

my father

*whose name is still heard in the humble homes of the
living counterparts of the characters of this
story, I dedicate this novel as a sincere
token of my deep respect*

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I 'TOINETTE	11
II WIND BEFORE THE STORM	27
III RAIN	40
IV THE HOUSE OF DROUILLARD	54
V "MY LADY!"	66
VI TO EVERY MAN HIS OWN	76
VII THE LIVING DEAD	87
VIII MORE SUITORS THAN ONE	97
IX THE DANCE AT JOE CHEVALIER	103
X WE SHALL GO	112
XI FLIGHT	119
XII THE CALL OF THE LOON	130
XIII AWAKENING	137
XIV WIND AND SEA	144
XV WINE OF LIFE	153
XVI DERELICT	158
XVII "A DISTANT SHORE"	168
XVIII INTERLUDE	182
XIX WINTER	190

CHAPTER	PAGE
XX HARVEST	198
XXI A DOOR IS CLOSED	209
XXII THE ROCK IN THE STORM	221
XXIII THE CURÉ SPEAKS	230
XXIV THERE IS A WAY	242
XXV NEW-YEAR'S EVE	255
XXVI SPRING	269
XXVII CANDLES	279
XXVIII WITHOUT WORDS	289
XXIX AND THE YEARS RUN ON	297
XXX MERRY-GO-ROUND	306

WHERE THE LOON CALLS



WHERE THE LOON CALLS

CHAPTER I.

'TOINETTE.

THE last days of fall had come to the marsh-lands which lie between the mouth of the River Raisin and Maumee Bay. Briar-patches still wore their autumnal dress of orange and scarlet; the deep, deep red of ivy and sumac still splashed the low-lying fields.

Inland, where the ground swelled away to rolling plain and timbered hills, distance linked the groves of hardwood together until they stretched across the horizon, an unbroken forest,—a painter's palette from which the colors of the spectrum, carelessly thrown together, dripped into soft harmonies.

And yet it was the wind-bent cedars,—a blackish, freshly-varnished green—fringing the drifting sands of Bay Pointe, which caught and held the eye . . . the cedars and the sullen, white-capped waters of Lake Erie. . . . They alone were vibrant with life; stolid watchers of a dead and dying world.

Fall, here, was the saddest time of the year—as it

must be wherever winter comes to strangle life with its icy fingers.

During the brief noon-time, quail still called from the stubble; red-winged blackbirds sailed over the brown marshes. Where the restless lake bit into the land to make La Plaisance Bay, jewelled waves broke upon the wide strip of white beach.

It lulled suspicion so completely that one found it hard to believe that winter was so near. But where two weeks ago the sun had ridden high until late afternoon, now hardly a day came but found the skies leaden by two o'clock. To-day proved no exception. It had been warm at noon; but the girl, who came to the door of the long, low cabin set well back from the beach and half hidden in the little clump of cedars, which marked the spot where Otter Creek joined the bay, shivered as the cold wind struck her.

Although hatless, she was warmly dressed, and if the cold, freshening wind made her wince it was because it reached the spirit of her rather than the flesh. Her dark-brown eyes narrowed pensively as she gazed across the water toward the distant tip of Bay Pointe. Turning her head slowly, she glanced along the horizon until she peered into the north where, beyond the jutting headland which formed the far shore of La Plaisance Bay, lay Monroe—or Frenchtown, as her grandfather still called it.

She had been to Monroe twice. As the crow flies, it was only eight miles from cabin to town; by water, it was nearer twelve,—a long beat up the shore to the mouth of the Raisin and a back-breaking two miles and a half of rowing or tortuous navigating of the river itself. And yet, in that land of few roads, men travelled by water whenever possible; in winter they went over the ice.

Monroe was only a village, but it was old, French, Catholic and wholly to be desired. The girl in the doorway would have asked for nothing better than to end her days there. Often she had dreamed of such a happy state of affairs. There was a convent in Monroe—Sidonie Morrin had taken the veil there. Between Sidonie and herself there flowed a very wide sea, but often when her imagination ran riot, she pictured herself following in Sidonie's footsteps; and if she were alone in the cabin at the time, she would circle about the long room in imitation of the nuns, her eyes cast down and a sad, sweet smile on her lips, and imagine that she was passing down one of Monroe's paved streets, a bowing world before her.

All this had sprung from no great sense of religious devotion. In fact quite the reverse was true. Life had revealed itself as a never-ending struggle for existence. She was not yet twenty, but for five years or more she had done the work of a man. The few clothes she had,

she made herself. The girls of her acquaintance did likewise; and like her, they went barefoot from early May until October, save on Sundays, or such other days, as took them to church or mill at Vienna or more distant Monroe. Hers was the common lot, and if self-pity never buried its fangs in her consciousness it was true, nevertheless, that she often found occasion to envy the nuns their placid, aye exalted, life.

Other girls along the bay—Josephine Duval, for instance—had felt this urge for something better than the hard, peasant-like existence to which they had been born. Josephine had gone to Toledo to work in a factory. She had come back once or twice with her city ways and fine clothes. That had been several years ago. Her parents still lived in their cabin on Woodchuck Creek. Josephine sent them money occasionally. But no one mentioned her name anymore; and the young girls and boys surmised why. . . . Truly, it were better to become a nun than that!

But 'Toinette Chevalier was untroubled by any thought of Josephine Duval as she stood gazing off across the water, the wind whipping her clothes out behind her and revealing her rounded ankles and gently swelling but sturdy limbs and strong, deep-bosomed body. She had seen winter close in even as it was doing now, but never before had it filled her with a feeling

of isolation and loneliness. For some reason, it seemed that a hand was at her throat.

Winter, heretofore, had not been without its good times; and yet, she found it impossible to reconcile herself to the long months of snow and ice which were so inevitably coming.

The mood had been growing on her for several days. Her grandfather had not been sober in months, but he had remarked the change in her. Surprised, and strangely embarrassed, she had turned away wondering what he read in her eyes that made him so angry. . . . Why should the murmuring cedars and leaden skies weigh so heavily on her?

The nor'easter, which was setting in, would blow for three days, piling up the water from North Cape all the way to Stony Point. At this time of the year a nor'easter usually brought snow.

In her mind's eye, 'Toinette could see the swollen waters of the marshes creeping back over the low fields and roads until Petee's Marsh and Plum Creek Bay, and all the other marshes between the cabin and the Raisin were one. . . . A great, weed-clogged sea, with only the rows of half-submerged cedars and occasional projecting stretches of rail fence to remind one that things were not always thus.

If the nor'easter really showed its teeth, most of the shanties along the bay would feel it. More than once

the high water had plucked a cabin from its pilings and swept it across the marsh or far up Otter Creek only to deposit it in some one's woods or on some half-cleared farm, where, from necessity, it must remain forever after.

'Toinette remembered how Flygette La Plante had awakened in the middle of the night to find his shanty afloat. He had put his mother-in-law and Agathe, his wife, and all the little La Plantes, into the big flat-bottomed boat, that he used for lifting his nets, and followed the shanty across country. It had come to rest finally, upon the shelving bank of Otter Creek, a mile and a half from the spot where it formerly stood.

That had been three years ago. The shanty was still there. Agathe claimed that she liked it better than on the bay. The road to Vienna passed nearby and enabled her to keep in touch with her many relatives. Flygette had taken the enforced move quite philosophically. He was a very profane man, and the strange manner in which he had quitted the bay provided him with a subject which, even now, gave no sign of failing to stir him to his best. Of course everybody had laughed and taunted him and made him the butt of many a rude jest.

'Toinette had laughed with the others, but she failed to find Flygette's plight amusing to-day. As she saw it now it but typified the unceasing fight which all of

them were forever waging against the elements. She had often waded knee-deep through ice-cold water to feed her chickens or Honorine, the old mare. And yet, these things had always been, and were like to be forever. What if it did storm and the roads become hub deep with mud and water?—she had no thought, or hope, of going to Monroe.

It dawned on her suddenly that she was not thinking of Monroe,—save as it signified the outside world. . . . The outside world! . . . Monroe, Canada (across the lake) and Toledo! . . . She shook her head: no—not Toledo; it had no place in her dreams. Josephine Duval's experience there had something to do with this, no doubt; but long before Josephine had flashed so meteorically across 'Toinette's skies, the portentous red glow, which never failed to stain the heavens far to the south of Bay Pointe whenever fire claimed a grain-elevator or factory, had instilled in her a fear of the distant town. The pictures of it, which she conjured in her mind, were forbidding. Business men from Toledo often came to the bay to shoot ducks and snipe. They were well-dressed, prosperous men who were as strange to her as she was to them. Her grandfather welcomed them; but she could not forget that it was men like them who had made it impossible for her people to hunt or fish on Bay Pointe Marsh. Isadore Couzino

had dared them to stop him, and one of the club's watchmen had killed him. . . .

But Monroe?—surely if the storms, and snow, and ice were to keep one from going there they would keep one from coming from Canada, which was much further away. 'Toinette sighed at the thought; many men came from Canada to see her grandfather—almost too many. She narrowed her eyes and scanned the billowing lake. It was almost as if she expected to catch sight of the swaggering, boisterous men who so often slipped into La Plaisance Bay after nightfall and sailed away before dawn.

They were a wild, fearless set, huge of body and deep-voiced. When they sang, they drowned the sound of the rain beating against the windows and the booming of the surf; and when they danced the cabin shook beneath their heavy feet. If the girls from the bay were not there to dance with them, they paired off among themselves—great, grinning figures of men, promenading and swinging their partners with the abandon of clumsy giants.

They were many; but 'Toinette's thoughts were concerned with only one—Placide Labadee—Captain Labadee, as her grandfather called him. The admission came grudgingly, but without reservation; and although she had long been closing her eyes to the truth,

as girls of her age so often do, it came as something of a revelation.

Her boldness startled her, and although no blush of embarrassment stole over her cheeks, her red lips parted tremulously in a smile that held all of the witchery of an April day. Strangely stirred, she threw back her head and laughed. It was a soft, mocking note. Abandoning herself to the moment, she closed her eyes and let her thoughts drift whither they would.

Even so had she stood one night now more than a month gone. Just so? . . . No: Captain Labadee's arm had been about her waist! . . . Placide——

How clearly she saw him again; felt the strength of the great arm that had held her so easily; trembled at memory of the devils which had danced in his eyes! . . . Thus to be with him once more. The thought warmed her blood.

He had said he would come again before the ice covered the lake. She liked to think that it was because of her that he came—never before had he crossed so late in the year. But some sudden storm, some unlooked for turn of weather, might well prevent his coming.

The thought was so chilling that she opened her eyes in sudden alarm,—the winter was so long, Canada so far away!

He had told her of the gay parties there, of the

dances and the week-long round of festivities which always ushered in the New Year. No need for her to wonder how he would spend the winter.

With strange inconsistency, it may seem, she caught herself hoping that Placide might not be too happy. Between the girls of distant Canada and herself there had always been the bond of race and language; but now she was conscious of a very distinct barrier. She wondered what the girls of Rondeau might be like. She had asked Placide, but he had dismissed the question with a depreciatory wave of his hand. Surely, though, some of them must be better favored than she. Perhaps there was one who might win him away from her!

She knew that if he but guessed her loneliness, he would come again; and neither storm nor ice would stop him. Nightly, for over a week past, she had turned her eyes to heaven as she repeated the *Acts* and murmured her *Pater Nosters* and *Aves*, beseeching God and the Holy Mother to keep the lake open that he might come to her. That he would come but to go, mattered not; just to hear his voice again and to look upon him were happiness enough to last all winter long.

From inside the cabin came her grandfather's voice, raised gruffly at Loup, the dog, ordering him out of his way. 'Toinette turned and glanced rather fearfully

at the door as she heard her grandfather approaching it with shuffling steps.

Well enough she knew how angry he would be were he but to suspect that her thoughts were of Captain Labadee. More times than she could remember had he warned her that she must never raise her eyes to the men who came to see him. Once, he had cautioned her with the flat of his hand. What would he say were he to know that she had offered her lips to Placide?

The answer made her draw in her breath sharply. But was she to remain a child forever? Did he still believe her ignorant of the mysterious business that brought Placide and the others to the cabin? It was preposterous. Why every one from the bay to Vienna knew what brought them there! Even Father Braire, the *curé*, had smacked his lips over liquor that never knew the virtue of a revenue stamp. And the woolens they wore on Sundays—who brought them if not Placide and the others? . . . 'Toinette knew. She wondered why they felt constrained to whisper about it. To her, it was an honest business. Surely, they paid for what they got; and in money not easily come by.

'Toinette did not wait for her grandfather to open the door, but started for the barn, fearing that he might read in her eyes some hint of the longing that consumed her. The discovery could bring her only unhappiness, for Grandfather Chevalier was a scolding

old tyrant. When mellow with liquor he was jovial enough, but even at such times he rarely ever offered her any sign of affection.

Beneath his roof revelry often reigned unchecked for days; ending, more often than not, in violence,—a knife thrust or the punishing blow of a hurtling bottle. It was hardly the environment one would select for a young girl. Still, 'Toinette accepted it without question in quite the same way that she accepted her grandfather. Having listened since childhood to the blasphemies of drink-loosened tongues, it followed that she seldom heard them when they reached her now. Indeed, she never complained about her grandfather's visitors. But for the carousing, ribald crew that so frequently gathered about him her life would have been hopelessly drab.

And if some strapping young giant chucked her under the chin, she found it far from unpleasant. Indeed it often delighted her to lead them on, secure in the realization that she played a safe game:—she was not for them, and they were not for her. She knew it, and those who came there knew it too. Without resorting to words, her grandfather had communicated the fact that he would slay the fool rash enough to offer her an indignity. She fancied that Placide had thought of that as he held her in his arms.

'Toinette realized that the barrier which Grandfather

Chevalier had raised was intended to mark a social distinction between these men and herself. Its purpose, however, remained a riddle; as did his futile endeavor to keep her in ignorance of the tie that bound him to Placide and the others. She sometimes wondered if the fear that some one might steal her away from him had ought to do with it. She knew that he hoped to marry her off to Cleophas Pecor, the son of the blacksmith, or Xavier Drouillard, whose father ran the general store at Vienna,—good businesses backed up with rich farms.

Cleophas was nobody's fool; but Xavier——? 'Toinette's teeth clicked at thought of him. He had been studying medicine at Monroe for two years now. She hoped that he would stay there forever with his pills and powders. She always rebelled at the picture of herself married to him. Coming now, it infuriated her.

Arriving at the barn, she flung the heavy door back so sharply that it rocked on its hinges. Half turning, she saw that her grandfather had come out, and that he was sweeping the lake with an old-fashioned glass. He did this whenever he expected some one. 'Toinette stopped in her tracks to watch him.

Grandfather Chevalier was a squat, unkempt figure as he stood there hunched over into the wind, his round, ruddy face well buried in a half-circle of bushy gray whiskers. Shaggy eyebrows curtained his shrewd,

squinting eyes. He was old, but there was strength in his broad body that even long over-indulgence in whiskey had not sapped.

The position of his arms as he held the glass to his eye did not conceal the fact that they were overly long for his body. The hands were huge. Somehow in looking at them one visioned them holding a paddle. Certainly they were the hands and arms of the *voyageur* of a forgotten day.

'Toinette was some distance away, but she heard the grunt that escaped him and saw his arms stiffen as if he had caught sight of that for which he searched. She was suddenly aware of the tumultuous beating of her heart. For a second or two her grandfather stood as if carved out of stone. Without warning, then, he brought his glass down, and wheeling swiftly he shouted:

"The *Heloise*—Captain Labadee—is standing outside!"

This was ever his best moment. Always in this fashion did he announce to her the coming of the scowling schooners which apparently sailed up out of nowhere: and always 'Toinette had been thrilled. At moments like this Grandfather Chevalier became a commanding figure. A mantle of importance seemed to fall upon his shoulders. Into his voice crept the flavor of the

sea. And where but a second gone he had been hunched over, dreaming, he was now erect,—impatient of her!

'Toinette could only stare at him,—speechless! *He was coming! . . . Placide!* Her prayers had not been in vain. Her cheeks burned with fire. Unconsciously her fingers sought the strands of black hair which the wind had loosened. She trembled as she saw her grandfather start toward her.

“'Toinette!” he roared. “Hurry! Don’t stand there gaping at me; you’ve got to be back from Vienna before night. Hitch up Honorine, and go! Tell Amador to bring his fiddle. We’ll dance to-night! Ha! Ha!” His laugh was a cannonade. “Maybe the Val-lequette boys will come—and Julie and Delphine. Tell all of them! When you are ready, come to the house; I’ll have some money for you.”

He waited to see her pull down Honorine’s harness before he turned back to the cabin. 'Toinette hid her face in the old mare’s mane when he had gone. . . . Placide had kept his word: he had come as he said he would.

O the efficacy of prayer! She had asked, and she had received. A tear ran down her cheek. She caught her breath and laughed,—just a single note ending in a sigh, but it seemed to free her spirit of the weight under which it had bent.

Her thoughts turned to heaven, and out of the full-

ness of her heart she gave thanks to the Holy Mother who had not been impassive to her plea:—"Hail Mary, full of grace . . ."

Honorine turned her head inquiringly and nickered softly as the sacred words of the Ave rose above the whining of the wind. 'Toinette put out her hand and stroked the mare's cold muzzle, but she did not look up. Again and again she repeated the short prayer; and although the well-known words rippled from her lips with almost mechanical rhythm, they were born of deep humility and a faith that was boundless.

CHAPTER II.

WIND BEFORE THE STORM.

IN the past, 'Toinette had always been eager to go to Vienna, but as she drove away from the cabin to-day she glanced back regretfully. The dirt road—it was really nothing more than a beaten path—followed the bay shore until it reached the woods to which the children of St. Mary's parish came in summer for their picnics.

Once safely screened from her grandfather's eyes, she pulled Honorine to a stop, and standing up on the seat of the light spring-wagon, her eyes swept the rolling lake for sight of the distant speck which would be the *Heloise*. Her search was unrewarded. She got down and picked up the reins; and then, moved by a sudden longing, she dropped them and climbed up on the seat again and scanned the lake once more. Sea-gulls sailed over the bay, their wide wings flattened against the wind; but beyond, there was only heaving water and leaden sky.

Cast down, 'Toinette picked up the reins again and touched Honorine with the whip. . . . Had her grandfather been mistaken? Was Placide *really* out there?

She could not remember when a vessel had failed to appear in answer to Grandfather Chevalier's announcement of its coming. And yet, there was something of uncertainty about it—even after all these years—and she realized this was so only because it meant so much this once.

The tops of the great trees were thrashing to and fro and setting up a great din. Old Honorine held her ears stiffly erect. Throwing up her head, she sniffed the wind uneasily; and when 'Toinette gave the word, she broke into a sharp trot without further urging.

Half an hour later they were out of the woods and away from the booming of the surf. Now the road ran between low, unfenced fields, unproductive and worthless save for an occasional crop of marsh-hay. Patches of flags and nodding brown cattails dotted the sedge, and where the water had settled alongside the road rushes grew rank.

It was a desolate scene; and yet it was not without beauty of a sort,—wild, mysterious. But 'Toinette had looked upon it so often that it made no impression to-day. The wind brought to her nostrils the pungent and invigorating redolence of marsh-grass and wild rice; she drew it into her lungs in great breaths; but it was done unconsciously.

As she rode on, her roving eye caught sight of an unfinished muskrat-house in a small slough beside the

road. Its walls were thick and already three feet high; sure enough sign of a long and hard winter.

A pair of shrewd little eyes peered at 'Toinette as she passed the nest. She pointed her whip at the animal and it flopped into the water with a loud splash. Honorine reared at the unexpected sound.

The muskrat-house had been left far behind by the time the mare got over her skittishness. 'Toinette, however, still mused over the fate which awaited its occupants. She knew their work would avail them nothing; for, with the first ice, old Amador and his brother Antoine would come with their traps and long, barbed spears. Soon, thereafter, the skins of that particular family of muskrats, stretched upon frames of green willow, and looking like big, clumsy mittens, would be drying against the side of the shanty on Muddy Creek.

Others of their kind would join them there shortly. Before spring came, Amador and Antoine would jerk not less than two hundred muskrat pelts. It was their winter harvest. The flesh of the little animals was esteemed a delicacy; and the fur was the equivalent of cash.

There was not a shanty on the marsh nor along the bay but whose sides would soon be lined with long rows of drying skins. 'Toinette started to estimate the total, but the figures staggered her so that she soon gave up.

Coming to Sulphur Creek (once known as Skunk

Creek, and so named because of the sulphur springs which drain into it) she got out and led Honorine across the shaky wooden bridge that spanned the little stream. The bridge was just a platform thrown across the creek and without side-railings of any sort. Cameo Mulosh, returning one night from Vienna, and doubtless well along in liquor, had driven over the edge of it and been drowned.

The rotten old structure rattled and groaned as 'Toinette led the mare across; and she could not help feeling that one was more likely to meet his death by going through it than over its edge. For months she had avoided having to cross it after dark; but the afternoon was so far advanced already that there was little likelihood of her being able to escape doing so to-day. However, she whipped Honorine into a sharp trot on leaving the bridge. She hoped that she would find Amador at home. If he were up the creek with his gun, she would have to go after him; and that might take an hour. It was less than half a mile from the Sulphur Creek bridge to Amador's shanty on Muddy Creek. The road passed within ten feet of his place; so even while yet some distance away, 'Toinette was able to see not only the little house, but the boat-landing, and the narrow channel which Amador had cut through the lily pads to the middle of the creek.

She caught sight of a man poling a small punt up

the narrow channel; and when the man stepped upon the landing and started for the shore, dragging the punt after him, she recognized his peculiar limp and knew that it was Amador.

The old man saw her a moment later, and as she drove up he waved his hand to her. He was tall and thin, his skin the color and texture of tanned leather. (He and his brother often claimed their grandmother was an Indian woman; their features did not belie this). In point of years, both he and Antoine were older than Grandfather Chevalier. By comparison, Amador seemed frail; his crippled leg accentuating this impression, no doubt. And yet, as 'Toinette watched, he pulled the punt out of the water and dragged it up the bank to within a yard of the shanty door.

"Are you going to take that punt to bed with you, Amador?" 'Toinette asked with a laugh.

Amador wiped his forehead with his coat-sleeve, for even though the day was cold he was perspiring. He chuckled as he pondered 'Toinette's question. "I guess some folks along the bay will be doing that to-night," said he, his eyes twinkling and lighting up his usually grave face. "We have nothing to fear, here on Mud Creek. Is the water beginning to rise along the bay?"

"Not yet," 'Toinette replied, shaking her head.

"It will; that wind smells bad to me. We may get

some high water even here. I'm going to pick up a little before night."

'Toinette thought the place needed to be put in order, for everything had been carelessly dropped where last used. Even a new plough, bought that spring, lay rusting in a corner of the small patch of cultivated land which Amador and his brother annually put to potatoes. Oars, wooden decoys, seines and tools littered the unboarded space beneath the shanty. At one time part of this space had been fenced off for the chickens, but they had the run of the place now, nesting where fancy dictated and, save for the few scraps which came their way, finding their own feed, a manner of living which Amador's horse shared with them.

But if the brothers were careless of their other possessions, they made up for it, in part, by the attention which they lavished upon their boats, of which there were not less than six. Truly they were not the thrifty tillers of the soil that one found beyond Vienna and Monroe; nor were any of the others along the bay; and this despite the fact that all originally sprang from the same stock.

It puzzled 'Toinette, because she failed to realize that the crude, bizarre life of the marsh had made these men more at home on the water than on the land. If they were poor while their brothers were prosperous,

it was only because they sought to reap a living without ever pausing to sow.

"You are going to Vienna, 'Toinette?" Amador asked then.

"Yes!" she replied, rescued from her musing.

"Ask Sam Drouillard to give you a sack of flour for me, 'Toinette—fifty pounds. You won't need any money. I was going over to Bonvouillor's to-night for the old man's birthday, but I'll wait until you get back."

"You can't go to Bonvouillor's to-night, Amador. Grandfather wants you to come to the bay with your fiddle. Captain Labadee will be there."

"What?" Amador asked excitedly, "——this time of the year?—Captain Labadee? Hum—!"

'Toinette knew that she blushed as Amador lifted his eyebrows knowingly.

"He never found it necessary to come in November before—did he, 'Toinette? Eh—?" the old man queried, a mocking note in his voice.

'Toinette was on the defensive at once. "Why do you grin at me, Amador" she demanded. "Captain Labadee's business is his own affair."

"Yes—? Well,—maybe," (with a doubting shrug), "—maybe! He knows the risk he runs; he doesn't play the fool without knowing it. No—nor do I." And he

laughed as he shook his head with good-natured patience at 'Toinette.

And 'Toinette, embarrassed without knowing why she should be, dropped her eyes.

"Little 'Toinette—stretching her wings, eh?" Amador murmured more to himself than to her. And then very sagely he said for her benefit alone:

"Remember, little one,—it is only the foolish dove that tries to fly with the eagle."

Stung with amazement, 'Toinette drew herself up stiffly. She suddenly understood what Amador was saying—understood it perfectly, too—realized that he had surprised her in her secret. She was on guard instantly, and with an air of innocence that would have done credit to a more sophisticated member of her sex she exclaimed:

"What—what is it you are trying to say, Amador?"

Amador did not answer at once. For several seconds he did nothing but look at her, his eyes trying to beat down her own. A kindly smile broke over his face then. "'Toinette," he said, "sometimes when I come to your place I drink too much. That is bad—and good, too. Whiskey can't bring back the old times, but for an hour or two it brings back memories of them, and that means just about the same thing. When I play I know nobody expects anything from me but a little music for the dance, but when I've had four or five good drinks

I can close my eyes and hear my fiddle saying things that no one else understands. It takes me far away from the bay; it makes me young again. . . . Maybe that is why my eyes so often follow you when I come to your grandfather's house—maybe that is why I understood the way you looked at Placide the last time he was here. . . . Huh! Some one else must have understood it, too . . .” (Unconsciously Amador lowered his voice) “Xavier's father asked me the other day if there was anything between you and Captain Labadee.”

'Toinette gasped and completely forgot her pretense of indifference. “Amador!” she exclaimed earnestly, “what did you say?”

“Oh, nothing—nothing! I know Sam; you can't argue with him. I told him you were young, pretty—that he had to expect you to have your little fling—but that you were a good girl; that you would make Xavier a good wife.”

“No, no—*no*, Amador!” 'Toinette's hands flew to her ears to shut out this disloyal suggestion. “I hate Xavier Drouillard,” she cried.

“So? . . . Well, he'd be a good match for you, 'Toinette. Sam is a rich man. Xavier will get it all some day. I know the boy is ugly; but that doesn't mean much, 'Toinette. But if you won't have Xavier, why there is Cleophas. Cleophas is a fine lad; and he likes you, 'Toinette. There's plenty of good boys

around Vienna. They'll all have good farms some day; you won't have to live in a shanty here on the marsh. Don't go on distressing yourself over Placide. I know his kind; he is like the eagle; he takes what he wants. He makes fun of the Church. He isn't afraid of anything,—not even of God. I've known other men who laughed at death. . . . They are not here now. I tell you, 'Toinette, he will break your heart."

'Toinette had no reason to doubt that Amador's intentions were anything but kindly, and yet she resented what he had said. Hot words leaped to her lips in defense of Placide, but emotion choked her, and she turned her face away that Amador might not see how he had hurt her. But Amador saw her chin quiver.

"So," he murmured, "—you love him already, eh?" He paused as if expecting a reply. "You—you do not have to answer, 'Toinette," he said then:—"I know——"

'Toinette turned upon him tigerishly, her wet eyes blazing. "Yes, I love him!" she exclaimed so tensely that her voice broke. "I am not ashamed of it."

"No, no, little one," Amador pleaded, "don't be angry with me. Of course there is nothing to be ashamed of. Love can not be fashioned to order. It comes unasked and takes us where it will. But it does not always bring happiness, 'Toinette;—oh, a moment or two, yes; but it asks much and gives little. Maybe

by the time Placide comes next spring you will have changed your mind. If not: marry him, no matter what your grandfather says."

"My grandfather" gasped 'Toinette: "Does he know?"

"No! He watches you so closely that he blinds himself. As for Sam Drouillard,—humph! He'd be afraid to say anything."

'Toinette's fear of her grandfather's wrath made her skeptical. Still unconvinced, she said:

"He would be very, very angry if he knew, Amador."

"Ha——! I guess he would." And Amador laughed to himself at the thought of Grandfather Chevalier's wrath.

"He—he must not be told," 'Toinette pleaded. "You will not tell him, Amador?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" Tell him? . . . If I had any thought of telling him I wouldn't have waited until now. He'll not have a word from me."

"But he may know," insisted 'Toinette; "he may suspect. He has been angry with me for three or four days. He seemed to know that Placide would come."

It was Amador's turn to be surprised. "So he seemed to—expect him, eh?" he asked slowly, apparently trying to determine for himself whether Grandfather Chevalier had become suspicious or not. "Well," he continued as 'Toinette nodded, "if he knows, there

will be trouble to-night. It would be like him to say nothing to you if he thought Placide would come. He would wait like a cat until he could get his claws into him. That has always been his way. I've known Joe Chevalier for forty years and more. He never forgets; if any one hurts him, they pay for it."

"You think he may know, then?" 'Toinette demanded anxiously, her face white.

"I doubt that he does," declared Amador encouragingly. 'Toinette glanced at him sharply, feeling that his air of assurance was but assumed for her benefit; which was not far from true. "However that may be," Amador continued, "he'll meet his match in Placide. Captain Labadee has some friends among us; and some of the men who sail with him—one or two—will stand by him."

Amador was so frankly honest now that 'Toinette could not doubt him, and what he said heartened her. The next moment, however, she had cause for fresh concern, for he added:

"But they are mad—the whole pack of them!—if they run inside the bay to-night with this wind behind them. Placide ought to know better. He will lose his boat like enough. There is nothing that will hold her if he comes inside."

"He can run up the creek," 'Toinette suggested bravely.

"It would be madness to try it! The *Heloise* draws too much water; he will run her into the mud if he makes the attempt. But he may risk it. He is a fool if he does. *Mon Dieu!* Judgment, common sense—everything thrown away for a pretty face! The man must love you, 'Toinette!'"

"Amador! Amador!" she cried. "Why do you frighten me so? Why even grandfather says there is no better sailor on the Great Lakes than Placide."

"Huh! He'll have a chance to prove that to-night. . . . But you go now. I'll not wait as I said. Antoine will be here. He can help you with the flour. And you haven't a lantern, eh? . . . Well, Antoine will let you have one. You be careful crossing Sulphur Creek."

"But you will come?"

"Of course! I've never failed to come, have I? I'll start as soon as Antoine gets back; he is up the creek."

"Ask Julie and Delphine and the others to come?"

"Sure!—sure!" He raised his hand and ordered her on her way.

'Toinette picked up the reins mechanically and shouted to Honorine.

"Use your whip!" Amador called after her as she drove away. "It will be raining before you get to Vienna!"

CHAPTER III.

R A I N.

VIENNA (now called Erie) was scarcely more than a hamlet in that day. Of necessity, those who lived there led simple lives. They were a plain, devout people, almost wholly dependent on the Church for their worldly as well as spiritual pleasures. Every one was acquainted with every one else; and since they had suckled a hatred of aristocrats from their mothers' breasts, it followed that they recognized no castes. Rich or poor, they were one—or as nearly one as it is possible for human beings to be.

Father Braire, the *Curé*, interpreted the laws of State and Church and acted as their advisor in matters so personal as to preclude his being appealed to in any other rôle than that of friend and father-confessor. And so great was his seeming knowledge of life that, though often sorely tried, he never failed to send them away uplifted and enlightened.

The Church influenced them in almost everything they did. Like all French-Canadian peasants, they were pliable clay in ecclesiastic hands; but with rare wisdom, the Church abstained from asking too much of

them. Indeed she often gave ground that they might better adapt their lives to conform to the spirit, if not the letter, of her precepts.

It may be that this left them no better than other men. But be that as it may. Certain it is that not even their most biased critic could have questioned their zeal, or their faith in an ever kindly and ever patient Deity. They often sinned—and grievously too—but they were as often filled with contrition. And then it was that one fully realized the friendliness with which they regarded their God, and saw how completely they had succeeded in divesting religion of the forbidding austerity which so often clothes it.

Vienna had been built about the four corners where the road to Samaria crosses the highway which runs between Toledo and Detroit. An old grist-mill (now in disuse) occupied the southwest corner. The small, white house of Louis Ritchie, the justice of the peace, occupied the opposite corner (the northwest one, that is); but the tiny building was set so far back from the road that the corner was often referred to as being vacant.

On the two corners across the highway stood the rival establishments of Dan La Pointe and Sam Drouillard. La Pointe's place was a rambling one-story frame building divided into three long rooms. The space nearest the corner housed a bar; adjoining it was a

room set apart for groceries and general merchandise; beyond it there was still another room in which hardware and agricultural implements were sold.

A more pretentious building, built of brick and two-stories high, served Samuel Drouillard. The business was still carried on under the name of Drouillard Brothers, although Edouard Drouillard had been dead many years.

The institution which he had founded was more than a general store with a bar in connection, for there one could buy shoes, clothing, furniture, dry-goods,—indeed its stocks were so varied that a customer was seldom forced to look elsewhere, whatsoever his needs.

Groceries were sold only in bulk; one never dreamed of going there for a pound of sugar or a bar of soap. Sugar came in one-hundred-pound bags; soap by the box,—one either bought them in those quantities or traded elsewhere. Other commodities were merchandised in the same way. If this manner of doing business reminded one of a trading-post in the Far North, it was only what Edouard Drouillard had intended, for as a boy, in the days before he left Quebec Province, he had clerked in the Company store at Fort Vermillion; and Samuel Drouillard had no thought of doing ought but following the trail which his brother had blazed.

In many ways Drouillard Brothers overshadowed Dan La Pointe, although the latter's bar was more pop-

ular; and Sam Drouillard would have given anything he owned to have changed this. It was a tender matter with him. He knew that Dan La Pointe, who was one of his own "best customers," often stood at his bar, surrounded by a sympathetic audience, and made fun of the Drouillard home,—a really imposing affair of brick and sandstone, with an iron lion in the front-yard, and an ornamental wire-fence to keep trespassers off the closely-cropped lawn.

In pointing out these things, Dan never forgot to add that he knew who had paid for them; and the intimation was that his listeners, or rather, their friends, had done so. He also mixed a subtle poison into his words; addressing them as though they were members of the Commune, and holding up Sam Drouillard as a Royalist who had grown rich on their toil; and in pointing out his competitor's house, with its air of importance, he but called their attention to the aristocratic pretensions of its owner. When this failed of the desired effect, he turned his attention to Xavier Drouillard, and there he was on safe ground, for, without exception, they resented the boy's arrogance and clumsy snobbery.

There were times when this insidious propaganda could have been blown into flame, but Dave was so satisfied with things as they were that he was careful to see that it never did more than smoulder.

There were other businesses in Vienna,—a third saloon, a harness-shop, the little place where Wilfrid Benoit's widow sold notions, and Etienne Pecor's forge. The church (a brick structure surmounted by a white-painted wooden steeple), and the *Curé's* house, stood in back of Drouillard Brothers' store. On coming from the bay, one passed them before reaching the highway.

The blacksmith-shop, where Cleophas Pecor and his father toiled unending hours, was just across the road from the church. It was a profitable business, and to-day, as usual, several teams stood outside waiting to be shod.

The wide doors of the place were left open except when it stormed. Cleophas came out now to close them, for the rain, which had been threatening for an hour, began to fall. Glancing up and down the road he saw a horse and wagon approaching. A second glance convinced him that it was Honorine and 'Toinette. They were still some distance away, but the old mare's gait made recognition easy.

'Toinette had not spared the mare since leaving Muddy Creek, although she had known for half an hour that the rain must come before she reached Vienna. Her thoughts were as melancholy as the day. The cold rain fitted her mood and but added to her gloominess. A hundred times had she wished that she had not asked Placide to come. So great was her faith in

the supernatural that she believed the hand, which in fancy she had felt at her throat so often of late, had been but a warning of the trouble which she foresaw so clearly now. The oncoming night was pregnant with potentialities; anything might be born of it,—anything but happiness for Placide and her.

She had tortured herself by recalling almost forgotten incidents concerning her grandfather. Without realizing it, she had convinced herself that he knew her secret. So, needless to say, the revelatory flashes of Grandfather Chevalier were, without exception, in the same key. Bit by bit she carefully put together an ogre,—grim, revengeful and shrewd! To give it life, she had but to recall the mysteriousness with which her grandfather always shrouded himself. No sooner had she done so than the thing which she had created began to pursue her; and although she tried to turn her thoughts to other matters she could not escape its accusing eye.

Had she been mad that she dared hope that her grandfather would not find her out? In her overwrought condition the thought seemed preposterous. What if Amador did think otherwise? Perhaps he said one thing and thought another. What difference did it make? She knew Grandfather Chevalier better than a dozen Amadors did!

Fear prompted her to speculate on what the night

would bring. A score of possibilities presented themselves, and each held danger for Placide.

Several times she had been at the point of turning Honorine and dashing back to the bay that she might warn him. Since her grandfather knew the truth, he could hardly be more angry with her for daring to return with her errands unaccomplished. If Placide were in danger, the responsibility rested on her. And yet, wisdom whispered that he would not be turned back,—that he had come thus far with a jest for death upon his lips; that did he but suspect a challenge awaited him ashore he would defy God or man to stay him.

'Toinette was primitive enough to warm to this. The picture of Placide fighting her grandfather for her hand became more and more attractive the longer she beheld it. That such a conflict should find her arrayed against her own flesh and blood did not strike her as strange; although prior to to-day she would not have spared her tongue had any one dared impute such a thing.

Courage came back to her, in a way. Certain though she was that Grandfather Chevalier was aware of the truth, it still remained to be proven. Although this promised but little, she clutched it greedily; proving again how easily the lamp of hope is relighted.

She had thrown an old gunny sack over her head

and shoulders, and although the wind was now at her back it came in such gusts that she was forced to hold her head down to keep the rain out of her eyes.

Cleophas thought she had not seen him. He waited in the rain until she passed, but 'Toinette did not glance in his direction. When he saw that she was not going to put the mare in the long shed in back of the church, he returned to his work, his smile flown.

'Toinette had seen Cleophas from afar. That she failed to speak to him was not unusual, for she often drove by without bothering to do so. But Cleophas was always waiting there, a dog-like devotion in his eyes. Indeed it was this, and nothing else, that had made 'Toinette treat him so shamefully.

There were other girls living around Vienna, and the prettiest ones among them too, who thought it quite a lark to drive past Pecor's blacksmith-shop, giggling to themselves at their audacity and stealing sly glances at the forge where Cleophas, his strong arms bare to the elbows and his broad, hairy chest bulging from his carelessly opened shirt, swung his hammers.

If he smiled at them they blushed with confusion. It needed but a word to confound them completely; for the asking he could have had the pick of them. And yet . . . he waited for 'Toinette.

She had long been aware of all this, and although she pretended a complete indifference, she had taken

a vain pleasure in it. But as she drove on to-day, she reproached herself for having made game of Cleophas, for now that she was so sorely beset she looked upon him as a great, immovable rock,—rising high above the tumultuous seas which were tossing her about so recklessly.

She envied him that very placidity which she had scoffed at. She wanted to speak to him,—to ask him to help her. That she did not do so was solely because she feared he would ask questions which she would not want to answer; for obviously, she could not mention Placide's name to him, nor tell why the other came.

Just as she reached the rear of Drouillard Brothers' store, Father Braire, the *Curé*, turned the corner of the building on his way home. The path which led to his house had once been strewn with cinders, but they had been washed away years ago, so one had to pick his way carefully to avoid the pools which always formed whenever rain fell for any length of time. Father Braire seemed to avoid them intuitively, for although he was without an umbrella, he held his head up. Despite the beating rain his steps were unhurried. A moment later the wind caught his cassock and whipped it about his legs. There was no loss of dignity, however; he was always the priest,—calm, majestic.

His serenity was in such marked contrast to the

excitement which gripped her that 'Toinette found it hard to take her eyes away from him. She prayed that he might not recognize her, and she turned her head as she lowered it. She did not know definitely what it was that she feared Father Braire's questioning eyes would discover if he stopped her, but the very thought of having to face him filled her with alarm.

He had always had the truth from her, and she knew he would have it now. It dawned on her suddenly that she did not want to tell him the truth. For the second time within a few minutes, she was conscious of not wanting to admit that Placide was expected. It seemed to her now that to announce his arrival was to proclaim to the world his reason for coming,—it was so apparent, so utterly obvious! She even wondered if people were not smiling at her already, behind her back. She realized that her secret was no longer a secret, that she should have seen from the first that it would get to this,—that in asking Placide to come she but made certain of it.

Needless to say, her embarrassment was so great that she could not think clearly. When Father Braire hailed her, she quailed.

"So, Antoinette!—you would go by without speaking to me?" he exclaimed good-naturedly.

'Toinette gave him a frightened glance and made the sign of the cross on her forehead with her thumb-

nail. "No—no, father," she muttered helplessly, at her wit's end for an excuse, "—the—the rain."

The *Curé* shook his head solemnly; but gradually a broad grin crept over his round face. "So, it's the rain, eh?" he asked, his tone as naive as a schoolgirl's. "I suppose it is difficult to see the good father when it rains,—he is so small and thin (which he was not, of course); "I notice, though, that the young girls have no trouble in seeing the young men." He regarded her severely for a second. "You—you find that true, Antoinette?" he queried.

'Toinette was so ill-at-ease that she could only nod her head in abashment. Naturally she wondered if this talk of young men concerned Placide. And the rain?—would Father Braire stand there forever? His cassock was wet through already. In a desperate attempt to escape, she exclaimed:

"But Father, you are getting wet."

"It is good to get wet," he smiled, the rain-drops running down his shining cheeks in little rivulets: "I do not mind it." He fixed her with his eyes then, and he did not go on for a second or two. "You—you haven't a little surprise for me, my child?" he continued finally, and his manner had changed.

"A—a surprise, father?" 'Toinette felt her knees shake. "I—I——"

"No-o-o?" Father Braire did not wait for an an-

swer. "What are you doing here, then?" he demanded. "Why do you come to town in such weather?" "Toinette recognized his tone; it was the one he reserved for sinners. It rendered her as helpless as though he had transfixed her with a spit. Speech was beyond her for the moment.

"Aw-w-w! So you have nothing to say?" Then, to her complete amazement, he broke into laughter so hearty that his plump body shook until it seemed the buttons on his cassock must give way under the strain.

"Toinette gasped, wondering if he had suddenly gone mad.

"Come, come!" he cried, still rocking with merriment; "don't ever try to fool the good father, Antoinette. I know that you do not come to Vienna for nothing when a northeaster is setting in. Of course I know you do not come to see any one,—oh, no, no, no! That is impossible of course; but—if you have no surprise for me, well—maybe" (his eyes were shrewd and teasing), "—maybe I have one for you. . . . Xavier Drouillard came home to-day!"

"Oh-h-h!" "Toinette's gasp of astonishment was a strange mixture of relief and anger. . . . Xavier Drouillard—did the *Curé* think that she had come to see Xavier Drouillard? Was this all that he held over her head?

"Toinette's mouth was still dry from the strain of

the last few minutes, but she was conscious of living again. She felt the blood slipping through her veins and warming her. Xavier Drouillard! Without knowing it, her lips curled scornfully as she repeated the name to herself. He could come home a hundred times and go away as often, for all that she cared. She was not married to him now, and she never would be. She promised herself that she would run away—do anything—rather than marry him. To think that Father Braire believed she had come to see Xavier Drouillard!

For the first time in her life 'Toinette questioned the wisdom of the clergy. Every second for minutes she had expected to hear Placide's name fall from the *Curé's* lips. And he had been concerned with only Xavier Drouillard! She wanted to laugh,—to shout; and she opened her mouth and a strange sound issued. It was neither laugh nor shout, but there was gladness in it.

Father Braire chuckled to himself, for he caught the note of relief in her cry, and although he misinterpreted the thought behind it, he was not ignorant of Captain Labadee. It was his way to always say less than he knew. He had been waiting for 'Toinette to show him that he had not hurt her; and he would not have left her until he had had some sign of it; for notwithstanding the delight he took in tormenting the young men and women of his parish, he was the

soul of kindness, and he would have been the last to take advantage of one whom he considered but a child.

"You are a good girl, Antoinette," said he; "my blessing—" *In nomine. . .*."

'Toinette lowered her head as he made the sign of the cross and muttered a phrase or two of Latin. The words were without meaning to her, but in her mind Latin was so closely associated with God that she was at once fortified and uplifted.

She was about to drive on without even pausing to consider what she should say to Xavier Drouillard, when it suddenly occurred to her that she would have to face his father as well; and that was not the same thing at all.

But she was not afraid of Sam Drouillard. Here at last was one upon whom she could vent her anger, and her eyes flashed at thought of what she would say to him did he try to bully her. She did not doubt for a moment but what he had sent for Xavier. She hated him for that, and for having spied on Placide and her. Just recalling this infuriated her so that, without intending to, she struck Honorine such a savage blow with the whip that the old mare snorted.

'Toinette tightened her grip on the reins and threw her body back, sorry only that it was not Sam Drouillard's hair that she was pulling, instead of old Honorine.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOUSE OF DROUILLARD.

IN pleasant weather the young men, who were in town for the day, usually gathered in a knot beneath the wooden awning in front of Drouillard Brothers' store. It was a vantage point from which they might reasonably expect to reach the ears of the young girls.

'Toinette had often colored to their lightly flung chaff. She was agreeably surprised to find that the rain had dispersed them to-day.

For a hitching-rack, several lengths of iron pipe had been put together and fastened to the posts which held up the awning. 'Toinette tied Honorine and mounted the steps which led to the store. From her manner not even the most casual acquaintance could have failed to surmise that something was amiss, for her bearing was almost militant.

She did not know just what she would say to Xavier, save that it would be sharp and to the point; and she promised herself that she would extend her resolution to include Xavier's father, dared he question or patronize her as he usually did.

She expected Xavier to rush forward to greet her, and it rather nettled her to open the door and find that he had not materialized. She looked about quickly, wondering where he was, and if it were possible that she was the only customer. A swinging-door led to the bar-room. She could hear the murmur of voices there; but the store itself seemed to be deserted, though the goods were piled so high and displayed on so many racks and shelves that one could never be certain that he was alone.

Fully one-half of Sam Drouillard's business was done on an exchange basis; that is, he accepted produce in payment for his merchandise. As a result he was forever shipping butter and eggs, and in season, game and skins.

It often happened, therefore, that Sam and his clerk, Hilarion Navarre, found it necessary to leave the store to its own devices while they busied themselves with certain duties in the little warehouse which stood directly in back of the store proper. With this in mind, Sam had had a bell put up in the warehouse. A rope, working over pulleys attached to the ceiling, led to the center of the store, so that his customers could call Hilarion or him. 'Toinette pulled the rope savagely three or four times.

A few seconds later Mr. Drouillard appeared at the rear of the store, his eyebrows raised questioningly, for

he was not in the habit of being summoned so peremptorily. He was small of stature, but he always moved so quickly and with such violence, that he radiated an aura of commotion. Somehow, his bullet-shaped head, with its thatch of tightly curled iron-gray hair, and his alert blue eyes bespoke the man's energy and indomitable will. A small moustache, its size out of all keeping with the generous proportions of his rounded face, was one of his few vanities.

When things went to his liking he was jolly enough, but although his laugh was hearty and his advice always optimistic, there were those who questioned his sincerity. Needless to say, they were the ones who had felt his wrath, and they knew that he was as quick to threaten as he was to cajole. The change which swept over him now as he recognized 'Toinette was effected almost instantly. The transition from shadow to sunshine was so complete that 'Toinette smiled in spite of herself.

"So! it's you, Toinon!" he exclaimed, rubbing his palms together unctuously as he came toward her. "Xavier's home; he's done with Monroe! He will be glad to see you, Toinon."

'Toinette's eyes flashed fire on hearing herself addressed as Toinon. Certainly Xavier's father could not have made a more unfavorable beginning. Toinon was the peasant name for Antoinette, and common enough

in Quebec; but she hated the sound of it. He had used the name to her before, and then, as now, she had chosen to interpret it as a patronizing gesture.

She was mistaken, but then—youth often is. There was little about Samuel Drouillard to suggest that he was ever swayed by sentiment. It is a virtue one does not look for in men who deal in first and second mortgages. And yet, Samuel Drouillard possessed it. That he kept it on a short leash and never allowed it to interfere with his profits is beside the point. He had called 'Toinette's mother Toinon—and in intimacy, too. She had been dead many years, and René Chevalier, the man for whom she had jilted him, along with her, but memories of her still lingered with Samuel Drouillard. Most of them did the man credit; but he was unable to forget that she had flouted him, even in death.

Among those who knew how anxious he was to have Xavier wed 'Toinette, there were many who wondered what prompted him. Some whispered that it but proved that Joe Chevalier had a fortune put away somewhere, that Sam Drouillard knew what he was doing. Others said the lawyers must have found that there was money coming to 'Toinette from her mother's side (she was related to the Gagniers of Monroe). Trust Sam Drouillard to know about such things!

There were other opinions, and in each money fig-

ured. These speculations were uttered with a wise shaking of the head. Not one but believed that some undisclosed motive—gainful, mysterious,—lay beneath the surface. The mystery deepened with each telling, which was often, for in a country where little happens to whet the imagination, such matters are seized upon greedily. And yet, no one guessed the truth, largely because it was so obvious: it was only that Samuel Drouillard was still trying to assuage the hurt which the other Toinon had given him, and that in 'Toinette he beheld a hostage for the love which he had been denied, but which, through his son, he might possess even yet.

The thought which motivated him was largely selfish, but there was something fine about it too, for he contemplated no less a thing than that 'Toinette and Xavier should share his money together. If this was hard to understand, it was only because it was not the sort of thing his acquaintances had come to expect of him; and of none was this truer than of 'Toinette.

The very fact that she could not discover the reason for his interest in her made her suspicious of him and added to her dislike for his son; and—without her being aware of it—provided the real cause for her anger as she faced him now.

“So you call me Toinon, eh?” she demanded sharply. “I am not Toinon! You know what my name is.”

Mr. Drouillard had seen her angry before, so he was neither frightened nor surprised. He laughed heartily at what to him was but a tempest in a teapot. He stopped rather abruptly, and his manner became serious instantly.

"Don't you be ashamed of Toinon," he said reprovingly. "It was good enough for your mother. Tell me what is wrong with it? We are only plain people."

"I was christened Antoinette, and I'll be called Antoinette! I hate that peasant Toinon!" And in truth this was the best reason she had on her side, and yet, had Placide called her Toinon she would not have minded it at all.

"Peasant?—so that's it!" The thought seemed to amuse Mr. Drouillard. 'Toinette stared at him questioningly. "Ho! ho!" he exclaimed, "but no: you are no peasant, Toinon. But if you were?—what of it? I am not ashamed of my blood. Don't let these American ways turn your head. When I go to Detroit or Toledo I am the first one to tell people what I am. Sometimes a man will say to me, 'Mr. Drouillard, you are a Frenchman, eh?' 'No,' I tell him, 'I am a French-Canadian!'" He brought his fist down on his counter with a resounding bang. "But as for you,—you will be the richest girl between here and Monroe before long. You'll be able to dress up in fine silks—the very best, and you will not have to buy them of Drouillard

Brothers, either" (This with a sly wink). "I guess you will have to be a great lady, because it seems to me that Xavier has come home with his head full of ideas like yours." He stopped with disconcerting abruptness and fixed his eyes on 'Toinette. "You—you are not surprised to hear that he has come home?"

It was not so much the picture he painted as the assurance with which he brushed it in that caused 'Toinette's cheeks to blanch. He was so sure about what he proposed, so matter-of-fact, that he took her breath away for a moment. When she answered him, her voice was so charged with anger and nervousness that it jarred on the ear like shattering glass.

"Why should I be surprised?" she demanded. "Xavier can come and go as he pleases; I have not said I would marry him!"

"No, of course not, Toinon; but you *will*. Your grandfather wishes it. And Xavier will make you a good husband. Where else could you find the like of him?" (This with honest pride.) "You will have everything a girl can want,—clothes, money, a good farm, and some day this business, and my house—the best house between Toledo and Monroe—even that will be yours some day."

"So you would have me marry a house, eh? You think so much of it,—perhaps you had better keep it."

In times past, 'Toinette had angered him with less

than this, and she expected him to thunder at her now; but as he stood before her shaking his head, waiting until the echo of her words had died away and the fire in her eyes had dimmed, a feeling quite akin to awe of him swept over her.

"No," he said at last, "I am not asking you to marry a house, nor a farm; it is my son I am asking you to marry. My heart is set on it. Xavier knows how I feel. He will wed you or he will not get a penny from me. But he is a good boy; he loves you, Toinon."

"Ha! ha! So he loves me, eh?" she asked incredulously. Mischief danced in her eyes. "Why—why doesn't he tell me so? Why do you have to speak for him? Why isn't he here?"

"That's a boy, isn't it?—runs away from the thing he wants most. He went out to the farm at noon. He has a fast horse now. He has got to show him off, of course. Xavier will be down to the bay quick enough."

"After he has shown off his horse, eh?" 'Toinette laughed with fine contempt.

"But he did not expect you would come to town to-day."

Hilarion, the clerk, came in from the warehouse then, and Mr. Drouillard and he set about getting the provisions for which 'Toinette had come.

The size of the order in itself was enough to arouse Mr. Drouillard's suspicion, and he went about the store with his brow growing darker and darker. When the order had been filled and Hilarion had gone out to put the articles in 'Toinette's wagon, he turned on her.

"So your grandfather expects some one to-night?" he demanded.

'Toinette had been gazing at the contents of a small glass show-case devoted to jewelry of one sort and another. She looked up too quickly to hide her surprise.

"It's late—late for any one to come," she countered lamely.

"There's only one fool rash enough to try it," Mr. Drouillard exclaimed. "You know whom I mean—Placide Labadee! Your grandfather expects him to-night?"

Their eyes struck fire as they faced each other across the counter in the growing dusk of early evening; the girl resolved that he should not have the truth from her, and the man equally intent on having his fear confirmed.

"My grandfather does not consult me about his business," declared 'Toinette. "How should I know who comes?"

"But you always know!—and you know now. Your manner tells me so plainer than words. It is Captain

Labadee who is coming! As for his business, it concerns you more than it does your grandfather. Why do you blush if it is not so?"

"I have no cause to blush before you," 'Toinette cried defiantly.

"But you do! You think you are in love with this man, and you blush to hear it said."

'Toinette could not stifle the gasp that rose to her lips. Mr. Drouillard noted it and he shook his finger at her as though he were pronouncing an excommunication.

"A smuggler—a fly-by-night—here to-day and gone to-morrow! What has he got? What can he give you? Are you mad?"

'Toinette failed to hear his last question. She had lost any lingering sense of discretion, and she stepped up to him now with her shoulders thrown back.

"So you call him a smuggler, eh?" she cried, "you who take a profit on the whiskey he smuggles! And you spy on me, thinking to make me love your son. . . . Huh! You are mad; not I. I hate the sight of your son. Let some one else have your house, and your farm, and your store and whatever else goes along with him. I swear that I'll never be his wife. My mother wouldn't marry a Drouillard, and neither will I!"

'Toinette could not know how deep she sank the knife into Sam Drouillard's heart, nor that it needed

but such a hurt to crystallize in the man whatever purpose he possessed, that he would let nothing stand in the way of his desire now. She had evidence of this almost immediately.

"Your grandfather laughed at me when I warned him," he said pityingly. "Well,—he'll not laugh to-night; nor will you."

"So my grandfather knows?" 'Toinette gasped, her face white.

"You tell him that Xavier and I will be there this evening," he went on as though he had not heard her interruption.

'Toinette fumbled with the buttons of her coat as she fastened it tightly about her neck. Hilarion came in as she started for the door, his clothes white, for the rain had turned to snow. But it was not the sight of Hilarion that caused her to draw in her breath sharply. Cleophas Pecor was standing just inside the doorway. She had not heard him enter. She wondered how long he had been there and how much he had overheard.

Cleophas had washed his hands and face and slipped on his coat before leaving his father's shop. Even in her surprise, 'Toinette noticed this and wondered what it tokened. His expression was so tense that she knew he was aware of what had been said. For a moment she did not know whether she regretted the fact or

not. She shot a glance at Mr. Drouillard to see if he had discovered Cleophas, and his flashing eyes told her that he had.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Cleophas," he demanded that second, his voice bristling with anger.

"No; I was just waiting to speak to 'Toinette," answered Cleophas, and he held the door open for her and followed her out.

"You should not have stayed so long," he said to her as he untied the mare. "It's night now. With the snow so heavy you will not be able to see ten yards ahead in another hour."

'Toinette looked at him in amazement as he lifted his foot to climb into the wagon.

"Move over," said he; "I'm going to take you home. The wind is blowing harder all the time. If we get across Sulphur Creek we will be lucky." He reached over and took the reins out of 'Toinette's protesting hands.

Cleophas had never been like this before. It quite took 'Toinette's breath away.

"But I can get home alone," she insisted out of habit.

"I'll go with you to-night," answered Cleophas, and picking up the whip he brandished it over Honorine until the old mare broke into a trot which soon carried them away from Vienna.

CHAPTER V.

“MY LADY.”

'TOINETTE was thankful for the storm as she and Cleophas rode along. A great silence had settled upon them, deepening with the passing miles until it became a barrier which neither seemed willing, or able, to scale. The snow, at least, gave 'Toinette an excuse for holding her head averted. She wanted to think, to arrange her disordered thoughts, to review the past hours, to contemplate what the night would bring, to prepare herself for meeting Placide. The effort came to nothing. In her mind there was only chaos. She was self-conscious; unable to fasten upon a thought and pursue it with reason, and equally impotent to lessen the tumult in her heart.

They had almost reached Amador's shanty when, without warning, Cleophas spoke.

“Are you sure that you love Placide?”

His voice sounded hollow and tired. He did not look at her, but 'Toinette fancied she could see the expression of his face,—hurt, hopeless. She was suddenly conscious of not wanting to hurt him.

“So, you heard, Cleophas,” she said wearily. She

saw him nod his head. “You—you are not going to be against me, too, are you?”

“No. . . . I’m thinking only of you ’Toinette. I want you to be happy. You are sure you will never marry Xavier?”

“I swear it!”

“I’m glad. You would never be happy with him. He and his father would always be reminding you of what they had done for you. I—I never could stand losing you to Xavier Drouillard.”

It was as a bond between them. In that minute, ’Toinette’s heart went out to the man beside her. She wanted to mother him, to erase from his memory the many indignities he had suffered at her hands. Moved by a sudden rush of feeling, she placed her hand over his. “You’ve always been so kind to me,” she murmured, and there were tears in her eyes.

Cleophas trembled under her touch. Minutes passed before he said:

“But Placide—you love him?”

He waited long seconds for his answer.

“I love him, Cleophas,” he heard her whisper at last.

’Toinette did not hear the groan which the wind whipped away from Cleophas’ lips. They did not speak again. Soon they came to Amador’s shanty and left the sack of flour and got the lantern which Antoine

had ready. They were almost to Sulphur Creek when 'Toinette addressed Cleophas.

"Even you, Cleophas, have no good word for him. Why is it that the very ones who once were so friendly to him turn against him now? It is because of me?"

"They are afraid for you, 'Toinette," he said slowly. "But I have nothing against Placide. If you love him, I want you to have him. I will even help you to him. But he shall answer to me if he betrays my trust."

A few minutes later he handed the reins to 'Toinette and went ahead on foot, the lantern flaring fitfully in the wet snow. He was back presently, his face serious.

"The water is over the bridge," he exclaimed. "I walked across; the current is strong."

He caught the mare's bridle and led her forward. When he came to the creek he spoke to 'Toinette again.

"You get down, 'Toinette. I'll take you across first."

He reached up his arms and clasped them around her. 'Toinette looked down and saw the water running white over the old bridge. She wondered what she would have done had she been alone.

Cleophas struck across boldly, the water above his knees. When he reached the opposite bank he put her down reluctantly.

"I'll get the mare now," he said.

He was gone. 'Toinette could hear him talking to

Honorine, urging her on; but apparently the mare held back. She listened intently and caught the sharp crack of the whip. A wild splashing followed, 'Toinette heard Cleophas' warning cry, and as she leaped aside the mare dashed across. Cleophas was standing up in the wagon, the reins wrapped around his hands.

"The bridge is going!" he cried, and even as the words left his mouth the snapping of timbers and the roar of rushing water filled the air.

When he had brought the mare to a halt he came back and stood beside 'Toinette. He held up the lantern and they peered into the darkness, but they could not see anything.

"Not a stick left," muttered Cleophas. "The Drouilards will never get across to-night."

"I wouldn't want anything to happen to them, Cleophas." 'Toinette searched his face sharply.

"Their horse will warn them. To get to the bay they will have to go around by LaSalle."

'Toinette was not easily convinced, but there was nothing they could do but go on. Soon the sound of the pounding surf reached their ears. When they came to the bay, 'Toinette strained her eyes for a glimpse of a light that would tell her the *Heloise* had arrived. One moment she was sure that she saw the light, but the next second it was gone, snuffed out in the whirling snow.

Cleophas hurried the mare along. Light streamed from the cabin windows as they drove up. The shrill whining of a fiddle announced that Amador had already arrived. Between them they unloaded the wagon, and then Cleophas went on to the barn and put up the mare. Left to herself, 'Toinette ran to the door, which led from the kitchen to the main room of the cabin, and peeked in. Only Amador was there, seated before a great log fire and busily tuning up his instrument. The sound of voices on the beach caught her ear, and she tiptoed to the window and pressed her face against the glass. Men were running a yawl out of the water. Five or six others stood about watching them and giving advice.

'Toinette recognized her grandfather's voice. Hardly had the yawl been beached when another boat came ashore. The man at the tiller, swathed in oilskins, was standing up. He gave an order and his men went over the side of the boat together. A rope was passed ashore and the boat fairly rode out upon the beach.

'Toinette's heart was pounding. . . . The boom of that voice!

It was Placide!

Grandfather Chevalier stepped forward to greet him. Arm and arm they came toward the house, while the others unloaded the boats and carried the kegs and barrels to an old twine-house in back of the cabin.

'Toinette knew she must not be found there at the window. She turned to go back to the kitchen, but Amador had discovered her.

"He is here, 'Toinette," he exclaimed. "You are shaking like a leaf. Do you want your grandfather to see how excited you are?"

"He knows, Amador! Sam Drouillard——"

The words died on her lips as Placide opened the door. The spirit of the storm raging without entered with him. He laid violent hands upon the heavy door and flung it back out of his way, and strode in, his pace unchecked, a white fury swirling about him.

Grandfather Chevalier was just behind him, his beard crusted with snow. As he reached out to close the door, Placide saw 'Toinette, frozen to marble, standing before him. He stopped in his tracks with head thrown back, the sternness of his face melting as surprise passed.

For a second no one spoke. The noise of the storm seemed to lessen. A charged stillness crept into the room. Amador, his old body tensed expectantly, glanced from Placide to 'Toinette and then to old Joe. Grandfather Chevalier's eyes were cold and deep. He seemed alive to the real import of this moment, appraising each little gesture and changing expression and taking his own answers to unasked questions. It was exactly as if Fate had dealt the cards and he was

peering over his opponent's shoulder into the other's hand.

Some sixth sense must have warned Placide, for he gave up any pretense of dissembling. With the grace of a *grand seigneur* he swept off his souwester and bowed so low before her that it brushed the floor.

Grandfather Chevalier stared with mouth agape. A smile parted Placide's lips; words were born on them, words that drained the charged stillness dry.

"*My lady . . .!*"

It was said so simply and yet implied so much.

So a knight might have greeted his princess. 'Toinette trembled. Amador caught his breath at the man's boldness. Grandfather Chevalier could only glower at him.

"My lady!" . . . two words and he had transformed the humble cabin into a baronial hall for 'Toinette. Through a mist she saw his flashing white teeth, his dauntless eyes. And oh, the smile of him! . . . the reckless smile, hinting of hazards lightly taken, of warnings ignored, of his impatience with life.

Grandfather Chevalier was staring at him through narrowed lids, a chilling glitter in his eyes. Amador's expression was coldly challenging. And yet, Placide continued to smile.

'Toinette felt the defiance in his eyes. It was as if he were telling her grandfather to make the most

of the minute, to read into it whatever it so pleased him to read. As she stood there, her knees shaking, knowing not what to do, he stepped toward her and raised her fingers to his lips.

He snapped erect just as suddenly and wheeled on her grandfather as if to surprise the look on his face.

“There!” he laughed lightly, “you know why I have come! And yet you talk to me of profit. Does a man risk his life for profit?”

Grandfather Chevalier met his eyes squarely, and he smiled too; but his smile said one thing and his eyes another. His lips moved as though he were about to speak, but he checked the words.

Placide turned to Amador. “I am glad to see you again, Amador,” he said.

Cleophas came in as Placide and Amador shook hands. He was always welcome at Grandfather Chevalier’s. He explained his presence there and told them briefly about the bridge.

’Toinette expected that he would offer his hand to Placide, but they just stared at one another coldly.

“You can thank Cleophas that you are alive, ’Toinette,” declared Amador. “That bridge has been falling apart for years. Somebody will have to build a new one now. I don’t know who, though.” He looked to Grandfather Chevalier to bear him out, but weightier

matters than the building of new bridges engaged old Joe's attention.

"Why talk about bridges?" he exclaimed. "You and I were here when there weren't any bridges; and we'll be here some time yet. Go to the kitchen, 'Toinette; make us such a supper as you have never made before. I want plenty of everything; the best I have for these men. They are my friends! I want to show them that I know how to treat a friend,—good food—everything to drink, — music — dancing — pretty girls——!"

His voice rose as he went on until he was carried away with emotion. "Let the wind blow!" he roared. "We are warm, dry; what do we care if it storms! We have had many good times here at Joe Chevalier's. My memory is filled with them. But to-night we must outdo ourselves."

He was addressing 'Toinette, but she knew his words were not for her ears. Between the lines she could read a threat. It held her rooted to the spot. She saw her grandfather reach over and pick Placide's hat off the long table.

"You are superstitious, Captain?" he asked as he handed it to him.

"A hat on the table—a wedding," Placide laughed.

"I have heard it said that it meant a death."

Grandfather Chevalier chuckled to himself. Turning to 'Toinette once more, he said:

“There are twelve of us,—thirteen with Cleophas. . . . Thirteen!” He paused and let his eyes go from one to the other.

“Well,” he went on, “*set* the table for thirteen. We’ll see who is the unlucky one!”

CHAPTER VI.

TO EVERY MAN HIS OWN.

GRANDFATHER CHEVALIER soon found tasks for Cleophas and Amador. When they had gone and he was left alone with Placide he turned to him and grinned, his shrewd old eyes narrowed into a squint that veiled them with cunning.

"So, you are here again, Captain," he exclaimed, and by his tone he dismissed whatever had been said up until now.

Placide stiffened. He laughed then, but he was aware of the tension this apparently innocent remark brought. "Here—and none the worse for it," he said, as if to make light of what he had done. "It was nothing."

"Of course it is nothing," the old man agreed, "both of us understand that. I've taken such chances many times. But my people will not forget it. They will talk for ten years about how you brought the *Heloise* in to-night. It is the kind of thing that wins them, this game of touch-and-go with death! Huh!" he grunted derisively, "the fools——"

"Fools," Placide echoed carelessly as he unfastened the buckles of his oilskin coat.

Grandfather Chevalier glanced up sharply, wondering if Captain Labadee were including him. "But sit down! Sit down, Captain," he exclaimed heartily. "I've got a bottle of cognac that was old when I was a boy. I've been saving it; but there may never be a better occasion for opening it. Sit down!"

A little room, that gave off the large, central room of the cabin held Grandfather Chevalier's private store of liquors.

Placide watched him as he entered it. Later there came to his ears the mellow clinking of bottles as the old man moved them about. In times past, Placide had felt as much at home in this room as on board his schooner; but to-night he stood with his back to the fire and made no effort to pull off his wet coat. As he stood there his eyes were never still.

Grandfather Chevalier came out at last, the bottle of cognac in his hands.

"There is it!" he exclaimed as he held it up. He got a cloth and wiped it off. He held it affectionately as one does a favored child. He set out two glasses, and they were of a finer quality than one would have expected to find there, and then opened the bottle. Holding it up high, he let the golden liquor gurggle into the glasses. "Captain," he murmured, half bowing to Placide.

Placide picked up his glass and they drank each other's health.

The old man smacked his lips with the gusto of a connoisseur.

"The sunshine of France is in it," he said. "Come, let us drink again. It warms my blood like a pair of flashing eyes warms yours, Captain."

There was a challenge here. Placide started to speak, but Grandfather Chevalier cut him off.

"Don't deny it!" he thundered. "I am old, but I was young once. Women are only a memory to me, —but what a memory. I was big, strong like you." He reached out and felt the bulging steel-like muscles of Placide's arms. "How like you I was once! Huh! My arms are soft now; but I was like you once. I tell you, Captain, I see myself young again in you. At your age, I could have done what you did to-night. And I *would* have done it too. To keep a promise—what better excuse does a man need? Wine and women steal away our good sense. It is good they do! They can not take away our courage, though. No! no! What is danger?—death? I never feared them. They are for the weak. You know I speak the truth. We go where it pleases us to go; we do what it pleases us to do."

Placide was staring out into the night. The old man paused to regard him sharply.

"You—look away, Captain. Come! Is it that I understand you better than you understand yourself? . . . You did come to keep a promise?"

Grandfather Chevalier hurled the question at him. Placide did not answer at once. When he did turn to face the old man his eyes were less grave than they had been.

"I did——," said he. "I came to keep a promise."

"And your men?—some of them are strangers to me. By any chance, do they come to keep a promise?"

"They come because they follow me without asking questions," Placide answered pointedly. "*I* am the master of the *Heloise*; not my crew. That is why some familiar faces are missing to-night."

"Exactly," Grandfather Chevalier exclaimed tersely.

"What do you mean," Placide flared back, his cheeks flushing.

"That we understand each other. I tell you, my friend, it can not be; 'Toinette is not for you."

"Ha! Ha!" Placide laughed mockingly. "*You* tell me so. What about her? *She* must give me my answer!"

The table was between them now, and they stood with their arms braced upon it staring at each other.

"'Toinette's a child!" the old man declared angrily. "She is as ignorant of life as a nun. Here for a month she has been looking for you. Only a child could

believe that I had not noticed. Do you think that I am going to stand back and see you reach out for her? I tell you, no! She is not for you. A dove in an eagle's nest. No!"

"An eagle, eh?" With careless grace Placide threw his leg over the end of the table and pulled himself up and sat leaning toward the old man. "You do not say that to me as a compliment, my friend, but I accept it as one. And the crow would stand in the eagle's way, eh? But no! Why resort to empty words? It is enough that I love her."

"No, no, Captain!" Grandfather Chevalier cried, his arm uplifted.

"You would keep her for Sam Drouillard's young ape, eh? Or for this slow-witted Cleophas——"

"Let me speak!" the old man interrupted, his voice rising. "This is my house; I am master here, as you are aboard your boat!"

He did not go on until Placide consented to listen to what he had to say.

"You are young, my friend," he went on then; "I am old. My arms are soft,—but my heart is strong! We are strong men together. We are strong like the sea is strong. We ought to be able to understand each other. I know you, because I know myself. We have always taken what we wanted,—a smile, a kiss, a dollar! We stop at nothing to get what we want!"

For instance, you with your boat to-night! A fool would lose her . . . with luck, a strong arm and a sure eye will take her out of the bay without a scratch,—if you do not wait too long. And yet, you'll be ready to take the same chance to-morrow if you live. I know; we are alike. I remember as though it were yesterday the spring when I came down the Beaujeu in a bark canoe. The ice had gone out only a day before. You know that river,—the rapids strung along it like the beads on a rosary. I'd been in the lumber shanties all winter. A kiss was waiting for me at Fourche——”

“I have heard the story,” Captain Labadee exclaimed. He thumped the table with his fist. “And what better business can a man be about than answering the call of his heart? Are we French for nothing? I tell you that love turns our blood to wine!”

“Love? Huh!—” Grandfather Chevalier got up and came around the table so that he stood beside Placide. “You do not believe it was love that sent me down the Beaujeu, do you?” he demanded hotly. “You know that it was not love. And the thing I see in your eyes now is not love!”

Captain Labadee slid down from the table, and they stood facing each other for seconds without speaking, their eyes locked.

“You are so sure, eh?” Placide muttered finally.

"I am! But I have learned how to keep what is mine."

"You—you are telling me to go,—is that it?"

"No, no, my friend! You stay as long as it pleases you to stay. Have your kiss if you must; I am not afraid for 'Toinette."

"And I am not afraid for myself!" Placide flung back at him.

Amador came in as they stood there beside the table. He stopped at the door and called to the old man.

"The twine-house is full, Joe," he called out. "Shall we put the rest in the barn?"

"I'll go with you," Grandfather Chevalier answered, pulling on his coat. Turning to Placide he said:

"And you, Captain; do as you please. I know you will not complain at the price."

He followed Amador out without another word. They had been gone some time before Placide moved. Minutes passed as he stared into the fire communing with himself. He came to a decision eventually. He laughed then, his mood changing with it. Picking up the half finished bottle of cognac he poured out a drink and tossed it off in a single swallow. Going to the door, he opened it and peered out into the snow. The lanterns bobbing to and fro along the beach told their own story. Closing the door, he started for the kitchen, a song on his lips.

"Toinette did not hear him enter. She had caught the threat which lurked in her grandfather's seemingly innocent words, and although she was busily preparing food for supper, she was so engrossed with her thoughts that her labor was entirely mechanical.

"'Toinette!" Placide whispered.

Thoroughly startled, she dropped the dish that was in her hands and wheeled tigerishly.

"Oh!" she gasped. "You—*Placide!*"

"Little one!—"Toinette!" He crushed his lips against hers and swept her up into his arms.

Seconds passed and he did not put her down.

It was for this moment she had waited. She was strong again.

"I have come for you, little wren," she heard him say.

She put her hands up and held him away from her.

"My grandfather knows," she cried. "Your life is in danger here. Xavier Drouillard's father knows too. He and Xavier are coming to-night to try and make me marry him."

"They waste their time! all of them! I'm glad your grandfather knows. But what of it? Why so sad? Here I am, as I said I would be. Let me see you smile, little wren!"

"*Placide!*" murmured 'Toinette. She pressed the palms of her hands against his wind-tanned cheeks.

"I have been so lonely. Every night I've said my Aves for you—praying that you would come. There was a fringe of ice on the bay yesterday,—it seemed to mock me. 'And yet he will come' something whispered, 'if he loves you he will come, and neither storm nor ice will stop him.' Yesterday it was my secret; to-day they all know—Amador, Cleophas—and they have no good word for you."

Placide held her off at arm's length and gazed into her eyes.

"And yet you believe in me, 'Toinette?—you defend me?— You do! Now am I glad that I came! Better a pinch of faith than a mountain of promises!"

He embraced her passionately.

"We'll laugh at them together before this night's gone," he grinned. "Your grandfather believes me a fool. He tells me my schooner is safe until midnight. Midnight? Why, she's dragging her anchor so fast she'll be on the beach in two hours. But two hours will be enough! Ha! Ha! . . . Look at me, 'Toinette! . . . I'm going to steal you away from under his very nose. Let him talk of death and signs. An hour from now the crowd will be here. When they start to dance, we'll go!"

"Go—?" 'Toinette's throat was suddenly dry.
"The storm——"

"We'll laugh at the storm. I'll take the *Heloise* out of here on wings!"

"But your men? They're afraid of my grandfather."

"Some of them are *my* men. They'll be ready when I say the word. Let Xavier Drouillard come; let your grandfather rage; and this giant Cleophas, let him scowl. We'll be in Canada by daylight. . . . Will you be ready 'Toinette? Will you trust me, little wren?"

'Toinette's face was white. Unconsciously she pressed her fingers to her throat, so dry was it. To go with him. . . . Ever this had been her dream, but now she must make her decision, and she was speechless——

"But the priest," she whispered laboredly. "Father Braire——"

"Father Braire? Huh! Do you think he would marry us? No; he'll marry you to no one but Xavier Drouillard! There are many priests in Canada, and just as good as Father Braire. Will you come, 'Toinette?"

Seconds passed as she gazed into his eyes. It was as if she hoped to read the future in them, to solve the world-old enigma of life. She had felt that she must die lest he came; and now——

Emotions bequeathed her by unknown ancestors

urged her on. This man was to be her mate. Him had she chosen amongst them all.

"I will be ready . . ." The sound of her voice surprised her. She even wondered for a second if it were she who spoke. "I will go——"

Placide had raised his finger to his lips. "The window," said his eyes, "someone is there."

He put his hand out in back of him and turned the door knob.

"I will give you the signal," he whispered. He stepped out and pulled the door shut behind him. As it closed a spurting streak of yellow flame stabbed the darkness.

'Toinette screamed.

The wind snuffed out the roar of the gun, but it could not deaden the sound of the falling body which thudded against the door.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LIVING DEAD.

'**T**OINETTE did not cry out. A sound fought its way through her fear-constricted throat, however. It was more than a whimper, for it was as savage as it was despairful. She threw herself against the door and spread wide her hands as if to bar the way to Death. How clearly she could see Placide lying in the wet snow, life slipping away from him with every tick of the clock! She raised her eyes to God, but she did not pray. Hers was an accusing stare. . . . Why had He permitted this to happen? How easily He could have turned the bullet. And yet He had done nothing. He was as guilty as her grandfather!

She asked herself if it was for this that she had prayed, that she had always been so faithful to Holy Mother Church. Was this the reward God granted to the faithful? Or was this her punishment for asking Placide to come?

The thought strangled her. It *was* her fault. She saw that now . . . she had asked him to come. And

now he was dead! . . . how heavily his body had thudded against the door. . . .

No wonder God had not interfered. No wonder He had permitted her grandfather to do this awful thing. Perhaps her grandfather had not fired the shot. But what did it matter whether he had fired it or had caused it to be fired? Placide was lying in the snow—the snow and mud outside the door. Nothing could bring him back now.

For the first time she realized that . . . Placide was gone! He would never come again! Invisible hands caught her and pushed her down. Her head sagged forward, but she clutched the door and braced her faltering knees. The wind moaned and shrieked at the window. Foolish wind . . . neither wind nor snow nor ice could ever matter to Placide again. She realized even now he might be looking down at her from that very pleasant heaven which Father Braire described so intimately. The thought did not cause her to raise her eyes. Somehow the picture of Placide, happy now in a vague and cold spirit-world, did not lessen the ache in her heart. In the flesh, he had been all that she desired. She thought of his wavy black hair, through which she had run her fingers, of the warm red lips that had closed over hers so tenderly, of the strong arms that had drawn her so close to him that it seemed

her heart must stop its beating, yet had made it only beat the stronger.

Out of agony of soul and body she murmured his name . . . to touch his hair again, to feel his lips against hers, to melt into his arms until she was one with him. . . .

Surely God had been mistaken, or else He would never have permitted this terrible thing to happen. Surely He had not known how much she loved him. Perhaps Xavier's father had asked the *Curé* to plead his son's cause with God. Perhaps they had stressed the fact that Placide was an unbeliever, that he mocked the Church. But did God know that she had planned to change all this when Placide had married her?

But what need to ask?— Of course they had not told Him. God had been fooled . . . and Sam Drouillard and her grandfather were to blame. This fact rose like a red barrier to any further thought. 'Toinette's parched lips moved time after time, and although no sound escaped them, the words she would have said were: "They are to blame."

Without knowing it, she began to put her grief behind her. The injustice of their deed grew and grew. Her eyes began searching the kitchen. She did not know it at first, but they were looking for a weapon. A wooden handled fish-spear caught her wandering gaze and held it. Staring at it fixedly,

she became conscious of her purpose . . . they must repay. They must answer to her for what they had done.

She found her knees strong again; there was strength in her body. She crossed the kitchen and picked up the spear. Her hands were cold, but they did not tremble. She even raised her eyes to heaven and asked the Holy Mother to aid her. Thus spiritually armed, she ran to the door, unmindful of the soup boiling over upon the stove, the hot iron licking up the dancing bubbles with a greedy hissing and sputtering.

She put her ear to the door and listened before she opened it. Only the booming of the surf and the screaming of the wind reached her. Inch after inch she opened the door then. A gasp was wrung from her as she saw Placide lying there, his arm flung over his face. The spear fell from her fingers. Like a bird brought to earth she sank down beside him. A mighty sob shook her. It unleashed her tears.

"Placide," she groaned, "Placide . . ."

With cheeks wet she found his mouth and pressed her lips against his . . . and his lips were warm, not cold!

For a moment her heart stopped beating. She thought Placide's lips had returned her kiss. But no; obviously, that could not be. She raised her head,

and as she did so a great arm encircled her and drew her down again.

'Toinette opened her mouth to scream, but the cry never left her throat. For a second, fear held her in its icy fingers, and over her there crept the rigidity of the dead. The next moment she was fighting to get free of the arm that was drawing her down, for even now she would not see that Placide was alive, that as merry a light as she had ever seen in his eyes danced in them now.

He was slow to realize how frightened she was. He spoke her name at last and released her.

'Toinette's hands flew to her mouth. "Holy Mother of God! . . . you are alive?" Her tone was incredulous. Placide smiled at her scepticism.

"Alive?" he echoed. "Why, I am not even hurt." He laughed as he saw how slowly belief crept into her eyes.

"And you can laugh?" she demanded through her tears.

"Oh, little one, this is something to laugh about. See . . ." and he ran his fingers over himself to show her that he was uninjured. . . . "I am all right." His tone changed and became very tender. "But you thought I was dead, eh, 'Toinette? You prayed for me, eh?" 'Toinette was crying softly with head turned away.

"But why cry now?" Placide demanded. "Here I am, alive and well."

'Toinette did not answer at once. She was angry with herself for having been so quick to picture him dead, and angry with him, too, for his seeming indifference to death. When she spoke her tone was sharp.

"Who was it?" she insisted. "Who shot at you?"

Placide shrugged his shoulders as he got up. "I wonder," he mused. "I've been lying here in the snow hoping some one would be interested enough to want to know how good their aim was; but, apparently, whoever it was, he needed no proof. A good shot never does."

'Toinette felt that he was implying something. She failed to grasp it, and rather piqued she said:

"You take it lightly enough, Placide. If the bullet had been an inch or two lower you would be dead instead of standing there laughing about it."

"No, 'Toinette. That bullet went where it was intended it should go. I was in no danger. This was a warning . . . a hint of what I can expect unless I give you up. Don't you see that?"

'Toinette shook her head, far from convinced. "Was it my grandfather?" she asked.

"No! His hands shake too much. He would not have missed at fifty yards. And if a miss had not been intended, there would have been a second shot."

'Toinette still shook her head, but Placide's confidence had begun to convince her.

"You know who it was, don't you?" she questioned, her eyes searching his.

Placide smiled at her earnestness. "No," he murmured, "I don't know who it was; I could make a guess, of course. Still, it was well intended, I presume. It will not make any difference to me, however. And you, 'Toinette, you will not let it make any difference to you?"

He put his arms around her and drew her head down on his breast. They stood thus without speaking for a minute. When she looked up her eyes were clear.

"I am thinking of you, Placide. It is because of you that I hesitate to answer. It is my fault that you are in danger; I asked you to come. If I should go with you now it may mean. . . ."

"It will mean only that we will go," he interrupted. "No man shall stop us. Tell me you have not changed your mind."

"How could I change my mind, loving you as I do? But your life is more precious to me than my own, Placide. If you should be killed . . ."

He stopped her with his lips. "Come," he whispered, "you are not always so gloomy. Why talk of death when life is so sweet? I shall not be killed. And my

life . . . what is life worth unless I can share it with you"

"You love me so?" she murmured faintly, deep within his arms.

Placide raised her face with his hands and gazing into her eyes he shook his head as though he found words utterly impotent to express the depths of his love. "Toinette drained the gesture of all its meaning and was happy.

"Tell me, Placide," she breathed in his ear, "is it wrong for me to love you, to want to go with you . . . you should know."

She thought he was long in answering, and, in truth, he was. Her innocence laid heavy hands upon him and locked his lips for the moment. He let his eyes stray to her face, to her lips, to her firm throat and the hint of rounded breasts, already mature and inviting, which her dress could not conceal. He took courage again. "Love wrong?" he queried dramatically. "Is life wrong? No: life is as it should be."

"Why, then, do they want to take you away from me? Why do they want to keep me here?"

"Why? . . ."Toinette! That you should ask why! Don't you see that your grandfather thinks of you as he does of his boats, of his cabin? Does love mean anything to him? When he talks to you about Xavier Drouillard, doesn't he always tell you how rich you will

be, what a fine house you will have? Does he say anything about how happy you will be? . . . Huh, of course not. And me . . . I have no farms, no fine house! What can he hope to get from me?"

This was so patently what 'Toinette thought herself that she found it very easy to believe. It crystallized her resentment against her grandfather and Samuel Drouillard and his son. It fortified her for what she proposed doing.

Gazing at her, Placide believed he read her train of thought. It heartened him, and he kissed her fondly. "Smile, 'Toinette," he pleaded, "and then go back to the kitchen . . . and *sing!* Say nothing of this to any one. And when the others come, don't be long-faced. Let them see you happy and smiling. Your grandfather and old Amador and Cleophas will be watching you. Don't let them see what you are thinking. When the dancing begins . . . dance, too. I'll dance. If that Delphine Roubideaux comes, I'll make them laugh. I'll make her dance, fat as she is. You'll hear me laugh, too, 'Toinette. And then the first thing you know, your grandfather will look around, and we'll be gone." He opened the door for her and half pushed her toward it. "So? You understand?" he grinned. 'Toinette nodded that she did, and fearful lest some further doubt arise to assail her, he closed the door on himself and turned away.

'Toinette stood alone in the kitchen a little dumb-founded at finding him gone. As she stood there trying to adjust her thoughts the smell of burning bread penetrated her consciousness. It proved an effectual awakener. For the next few moments she so busied herself that she quite forgot to worry; and once, unconsciously too, she actually did break into song, and when she discovered herself she did not try to check the laugh that rose to her lips.

CHAPTER VIII.

MORE SUITORS THAN ONE.

THE scraping of chairs across the floor, the boisterous laughter, the confused babble of many tongues and the good-natured but sharp blasphemies, which reached 'Toinette as she hurried about the kitchen told her that the men had finished their work and were waiting for their supper. She stopped to listen once, and heard the clinking of glasses and knew that her grandfather had broached a barrel of liquor. Whisky would make them more ravenous than ever. Soon they would be calling out to her, demanding food, hurling rough witticisms at her, and expecting her to threaten them for their impatience. It was a game they had played these many years, and 'Toinette knew her rôle quite as well as they did theirs.

Thought of the sallies that were sure to greet her made her wince, but she went so far as to promise herself that she would return them in kind, when it occurred to her that they must know that some one had fired at Placide. Surely her grandfather must know. To dissemble in the face of such knowledge would be only to arouse his suspicions; and although she had

promised Placide that she would laugh and be gay, she determined now to rely on her own intuition, to appear to her grandfather as one who tries bravely to hide the effect of a crushing blow, to seem even contrite . . . and all this that he might deem it unnecessary to take any precaution against her going.

She knew her grandfather would pop into the kitchen in a minute or two to see what was delaying her. Often at such times he would be so mellow as to make a show of helping her, but she knew his eyes would be sharp to-night. So when he opened the door a few seconds later, she was prepared for him.

"What takes you so long, 'Toinette?" he demanded, sniffing the air as though to gauge how far along the meal was. The appetizing odors which he inhaled seemed to reassure him, and his tone was less gruff as he asked: "You've got enough, now, eh? They are as hungry as wolves."

"There will be plenty," 'Toinette answered over her shoulder. She caught her grandfather's reflection in a broken bit of mirror which hung on the wall over the table, and saw how keenly he regarded her. She decided in that second that he was fully aware of what had happened to Placide. Very cleverly she caught his attention by saying:

"Sam Drouillard and Xavier are coming to-night—if they can get here. I'll save something for them."

"So . . . ?" He drew out the exclamation with great relish. "That's good they come. So Xavier is home again. You didn't tell me that, 'Toinette."

"The bridge gone—the Captain here—the storm—so much excitement I—I——"

"I know, I know. I guess you forgot. But that is good they come. He is a good boy, Xavier . . . good boy." He chuckled to himself, and rubbing his hands together, as though he were a usurer contemplating his hoard, he walked about the kitchen, his ruddy face buried deep in his beard, and whenever 'Toinette's attention was engaged elsewhere, darting shrewd, appraising glances at her.

"I wonder if they will get here before the Captain leaves?" he queried as casually as he could.

'Toinette was wondering too, and although her hands trembled as she took her bread out of the oven, she held her voice even as she said:

"They will have to go around by La Salle. It's a long way."

Her grandfather was secretly pleased at such matter-of-factness. "It is a long way, on such a night," he agreed. "But distance and the weather mean nothing to a man when he comes to see the woman he loves."

'Toinette wondered whether he were alluding to Placide or Xavier. He came over and stood beside her as she took the bread out of the pans.

"You know, 'Toinette, you are a beautiful girl," he said with embarrassing directness. "I never realized that until to-night. I've got to thank the Captain for that; he opened my eyes. No wonder Xavier could not find any one in Monroe he liked so well. And Cleophas . . . he is here too, eh? Ha! Ha! I guess maybe some others come too. I tell you, 'Toinette, if Xavier asks you to marry him, don't say yes too quickly."

He was watching her now and reading every fluttering of her eyes. He saw her catch her breath, and his guileful eyes glowered behind their narrowed lids.

"You—you don't want me to marry Xavier?" 'Toinette gasped desperately.

"Oh, I don't say that, 'Toinette," he protested. "Xavier will make you a fine husband . . . solid! You will never have to split wood for him or hoe corn. But there are others. You are interested in love now. Well, love is all right; I like to see people in love. But money is good, too. If you can get both, 'Toinette, you will be a very lucky girl, a very lucky girl! But if you cannot get both . . . huh!" He spread his hands in eloquent horror at the thought that there could be other than one choice in such circumstances. "If you can not get both, 'Toinette, don't . . . don't take love. It's easy to fall in love, and it's easier to fall out. You love to-day and hate to-morrow; but

hard work—huh!—hard work don't change its mind. But you are young; there's lots of time yet. Make Xavier wait until spring. And 'Toinette"—he caught her arm and squeezed it mischievously—"perhaps the Captain will come back next spring. And Cleophas . . . he will be here, too. . . ."

'Toinette almost upset the bouillon in her excitement. What *was* he saying? . . . Next spring—Placide! If he would only go on.

But Grandfather Chevalier had said all he intended saying. What he had not said, was that he expected to see the *Heloise* washed ashore, that Placide would find himself penniless; or if by some trick of fortune he should get away, that a word to the revenue men would effectually prevent his ever returning to La Plaisance Bay. And this, too, he had not said, that once Captain Labadee was out of the way, Xavier should marry her as quickly as ever Father Braire would permit.

The men were calling for 'Toinette now, and he left her, convinced that she had taken the bait he had so cleverly dangled before her eyes. He had not the slightest suspicion of what Placide proposed. Had he been warned of it, he would have found it hard to believe, so rash would the attempt have seemed to him. His eyes had traveled to the *Heloise* half a hundred times since Placide had come ashore. He knew how rapidly she was drifting in. Even as he had sat in the

kitchen talking to 'Toinette, his sharp eyes had fastened upon the blinking riding-lights and saw that they were ever nearer.

What he feared was that Placide might try to make a rendezvous with 'Toinette, to win her promise to meet him in Toledo or Monroe. He knew the man well enough to know that he would strike back, that he would not be easily turned from his desire. He fancied he knew 'Toinette too, and he believed she would be slow to consent to meeting Placide, now that (thanks to what he had just said to her) she had good cause for believing that such a meeting was unnecessary.

That this affair should ever continue beyond to-night was at best but the dimmest of possibilities, but Grandfather Chevalier felt himself prepared for even such a contingency, and as he sat down among Placide's men again his gaiety was no longer feigned.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DANCE AT JOE CHEVALIER.

ON such nights in the past, Grandfather Chevalier had sat at the head of his table in Falstaffian mood, quick of tongue and wit, sure of himself, reading a sense of deference in the faces ringed about his board . . . and envied no man.

He had come to believe it was for such moments he lived, and as he returned the smiles of the eager, shining eyes that were lifted to him as he sat down, it seemed impossible that aught had occurred to change the old order.

'Toinette followed him in a moment later, a great dish of steaming bouillon in her hand. They greeted her vociferously. They brought their glasses down, and pushing back their chairs, leaned toward her and roared their compliments and drank her beauty with utter abandonment. Their eyes were already bright with the whisky they had quaffed. 'Toinette awakened desire in them. They reached out to catch her hands. She placed the heavy dish upon the table and fought them off. Victor Cuvillier, the smallest

man among them, hung on, his beady eyes snapping as he leaned far over, trying to draw her into his arms; and when 'Toinette pulled away, he sprawled on the floor, to the wild amusement of his friends.

"I hope you break your head, Victor!" 'Toinette cried as she backed away. The next moment another hairy paw had caught her. It was old Eli, Placide's mate. He had been coming to Joe Chevalier's for twenty years.

"Ah, 'Toinette!" he laughed, "I got you now. Where's my kiss?"

"It's in the bouillon," 'Toinette scolded.

"It took you so long to put it there, eh? I wonder sometimes what makes that bouillon of yours taste so good."

Victor was on his feet again, his glass in his hand.

"Come on, we drink to you now, 'Toinette!" he shouted to make himself heard. He swept the table with his eyes to see if the other hands picked up their tumblers. The big glasses were full and they drained them with a flourish.

Eli still held 'Toinette and smiled broadly as she tried to writhe out of his grasp. It was good fun which all could appreciate, and they roared as the old man forced her down upon his knee and bounced her up and down to the sharp accompaniment of "*Malbrough*."

*"Malbrough s'en va-t-en guerre,
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine;
Malbrough s'en va-t-en guerre,
Ne sait quand reviendra."*

His old voice shook with merriment. Placide and the others took up his song and made the rafters tremble with their noise. Tears of laughter trickled down Eli's tanned cheeks. He shook his shaggy head in time with the singing as they sang the chorus over and over again. "Hey, Victor!" he cried, "you watch me. I show you how to get along with the girls." And he hugged 'Toinette bearishly.

'Toinette screamed, but she was neither angry nor annoyed. She knew all this was in fun. Grandfather Chevalier was enjoying it as much as any one.

"She has got to be a pretty big armful, Eli," he called across the table. "You can't hold her in one hand no more."

Eli let her slip away then, and 'Toinette stood back panting from exertion. She pretended a great anger.

"Say!" she exclaimed, "you want something to eat? Well, you stop your foolishness, then, or you get nothing."

"That's right, make him go hungry!" Victor cried.

"Take his plate away," some one else called and the others took it up, scenting fresh sport and deserting Eli in the twinkling of an eye. But they were too

hungry to make the most of it. 'Toinette filled their plates and silenced their chaffing.

With arms spread upon the table they bent over their plates and ate noisily. Before the last plate had been filled the first were making for a second helping . . . Hot bread and bouillon, that was all, but such a bouillon! Not by the widest stretch of the imagination could one have called it a soup. A dozen canvas-backs had gone into it . . . ducks killed that day. And onions and carrots, potatoes, dumplings—all swimming in a flour-thickened gravy—made it a savory and sustaining dish. No where else in the world do they make such bouillons. For a month now, wild duck bouillon had been the almost daily fare along the bay. Soon the ducks would be gone, but the muskrat would be there to take their place. In the spring, the catfish would be plentiful, and then long days of catfish bouillon. For it they would refuse any other food.

They were hearty eaters. Cleophas passed his plate for a third helping. He was but one of many, for at Joe Chevalier one was expected to eat his fill. No one thought to speak as he ate. 'Toinette went to the kitchen and returned with steaming black coffee. Spoons were few, and as the sugar-bowl traveled up and down the table the spoon with which they served themselves went into their cups, until the sugar in the bowl was more brown than white.

The bread was good, too. Some of them spread the bouillon over it and others contented themselves with dipping it into the rich gravy, but each kept a piece by him, and when they had nearly finished, put it upon their plates and swished it about in their fingers or turned it over and over with knife or fork until their plates were clean. And then there was bread and syrup . . . corn cob syrup, made by boiling corn cobs and adding the juice to melted white sugar.

It was as good or better than maple syrup. They helped themselves out of a jug, and generously too. Grandfather Chevalier had filled their glasses again. When they had drained them they pushed back their chairs and got out their pipes. And again they were boisterous. They wanted Amador and his fiddle now.

“*Brigadier!*” they shouted. “Play *Brigadier!*”

Amador put all other fiddlers to shame, for he launched into the ringing tune without pausing to tune up. They were ready for him, and they swung into it with a roar. And then they wanted “*Alouette.*” They got up and marched around the room to the tune of it.

“‘*En roulant ma boule,*’ Amador!” Placide shouted.

“Yes, ‘*En roulant ma boule!*’ ” Grandfather Chevalier urged.

“Toinette was clearing away the dishes and she sang it with them.

*"Derrier' chez nous, y-a-t-un étang;
En roulant ma boule.
Trois beaux canards s'en vont baignant
En roulant ma boule.
Rouli, roulant, ma boule roulant,
En roulant ma boule roulant,
En roulant ma boule roulant."*

The Vallequette boys, January and February, so named for the most obvious reasons, came then, bringing Julie Picard and Delphine with them. A noisy welcome greeted Delphine. She was big and buxom with an air of state-fair about her. She shook her fist at Placide.

"So it's you, huh?" she cried. "I knew nobody else would be fool enough to come on such a night."

Placide put on a hurt expression. "Now I'm sorry I came," he said dolefully, "you treat me like this."

"Pah! You're as big a liar as a fool. You hear that, 'Toinette?—he came to see me. Huh! I tell you—Say! you stop that!" she cried, turning on Victor who had slipped his arm around her generous waist. "I'll take you across my knee, Victor, if you don't look out!"

Victor was not abashed, for he understood Delphine very well.

"What's the matter, Delphine? Have you gone back on me? I thought perhaps you would begin to love me pretty soon."

Delphine was as big as he and almost as strong. She

lifted him up and shook him while the others laughed and shrieked and pounded the table with their glasses.

"Spank him, Delphine!" they shouted, willing to go to any length to urge her on.

She did get Victor across her knees, and she wacked him lustily, but the irrepressible clown reached up and kissed her.

Delphine laughed and let him go. She sniffed loudly and rubbed the back of her hand across her lips, making a wry face as she did so. "I guess you've kissed something else beside me, Victor."

Every one laughed.

Immediately drink was offered, even forced on her, and found her not unwilling. It was the unfailing remedy. When one was sad, liquor brought back the errant smile. It softened grief, rekindled hope, took the sharp edge off pain and fortified the weak and suffering. When one was gay it unlocked the doors to romance, made the old courageous and the young carefree. Their dependence was in it. They were close to it from childhood on. They looked upon it as a friendly thing, and never thought to fear it.

Of its virtues, one may best judge for himself. Whatever else it did, it colored lives that were drab; and they were lives that were not drab because of liquor.

The sound of footsteps without sent Grandfather

Chevalier to the door. "Ah, you, Pacifique—and Azalma!" he exclaimed on recognizing the latest arrivals. "And say—what've you got there?" He reached down and lifted up the little fellow hiding behind his mother's skirts. "My word, Francois, you are getting to be a big boy. So strong, too; soon you will be able to break up some wood for your mother, eh?"

He put the lad down, and Francois stared about, shy and scared-looking, almost lost in the clothes Azalma had made for him, with a generous allowance for growth, out of an old suit of his father. He had been asleep in the boat on the way to the bay, and he blinked his eyes owlshly as 'Toinette hugged him.

"I'll put him on your bed until we go, 'Toinette?" Azalma asked.

"Sure! Sure!" Grandfather Chevalier exclaimed. "'Toinette will go with you."

When Azalma and 'Toinette came out of the bedroom they found that Eugene Malbay had come. He smiled as he shook 'Toinette's hand, but his face never quite lost its look of sadness. There was something priestly about his thin, well-turned features. His hands, especially, were long and fine and strangely unlike the heavy, peasant hands of Pacifique and the others. They seemed to confirm his mother's contention that his father was a gentleman. No one seemed to know much about Eugene's father. The boy had lived alone

with his mother for twenty years in a cabin on the bay. A month back the mother had died.

This fact won him the indulgence of all, for death was something all could appreciate, and it tempered the chaffing his long face would otherwise have drawn.

But Eugene and Pacifique and Delphine and the rest were but the advanceguard of those who came later—in twos and threes and fours—until more than thirty were there . . . laughing, singing, dancing and drinking, and drawing off into little knots to discuss matters that were close to all of them,—were the muskrats likely to be plentiful, had the potatoes been up to expectations, was anyone west of Vienna buying marsh-hay, did they know the price of twine had gone up and fishing so poor, too, nowadays! The Laroques had a new baby. Perhaps Marcel would work now, or they would find themselves in the poorhouse . . . and they discussed Placide, and wondered about him.

CHAPTER X.

WE SHALL GO.

THROUGH it all 'Toinette moved, neither too gay nor too sad, meeting Placide's eyes from time to time and drawing courage from him. Her grandfather was in a jovial mood. She thought he might be watching her, and she turned on him without warning a dozen times, but always his attention seemed to be otherwise engaged. The feeling that she was being watched would not down, however, and she let her eyes wander around the room until they finally met Amador. Without quite understanding why, she looked away. She asked herself what she had to fear from him. Surely there was nothing . . . and yet there was; his glance had been too searching, too intense.

She began trying to surprise him, but whenever she turned on him she found his eyes on her. And it was strange, too, for he was well along in drink. He kept time to his own music with a heavy foot and strained his lungs as he called off the figures of the dance. 'Toinette wondered if he might be playing a game . . . seeming to appear fuddled when he was not.

Placide danced off with her when the music struck up

again. She could feel Amador's eyes boring into her as though he would plumb the depths of her consciousness until he could actually *see* what she was thinking. Placide saw the look of anxiety that crossed her face and his arm tightened about her.

"Soon now," he whispered, and to give her confidence, he added; "Don't worry; it's going to be easier than I thought."

"Amador," she breathed so low Placide barely heard, "he suspects. He doesn't take his eyes away from me."

"Amador?" There was quiet contempt in Placide's tone. "He had his chance. He . . . he made a great mistake. But you leave Amador to me, 'Toinette. Dance with Eli next; do what he says. Be sure now." And he laughed uproariously then, as though he had just heard the funniest of stories.

It was acting of a high order, but the slight movement of Amador's lips said that he was not deceived. Through the haze of tobacco smoke 'Toinette caught a glimpse of old Eli, seated at the table, a glass in his hand and Julie Picard on his knee. There was nothing about his demeanor to suggest that the next few minutes would find him playing with death. And yet when Amador tapped his bow against his fiddle for the next dance, it was Eli who bore 'Toinette off, he having not only mysteriously slipped away from Julie but routed four protesting rivals for 'Toinette's favor as well.

Eli brought to the dance the same tremendous energy with which he mastered the strenuous problems that came his way as mate of the *Heloise*. His movements were elephantine, but he invested them with rhythm of a sort. He swept 'Toinette along as a surging tide sweeps a cork. When the music quickened, he whirled her around so swiftly that her feet left the floor. Grandfather Chevalier laughed with the others at his antics, while 'Toinette clung to him like a scared bird.

Other couples gave them a wide berth or were shouldered out of the way. When they passed the door they were so close they could have reached out their hands and touched it. Eli wheeled without warning a moment later. 'Toinette knew that he flashed a glance at Amador. Whatever he drew from it she did not know, but the next time around Eli steered a course that kept them some feet away from the door. "Amador is looking at us, eh? Quick, don't let him catch your eye," he cautioned.

A grunt of satisfaction escaped him as 'Toinette confirmed his supicion. When they came to the door again their hands brushed it. They could have thrown it open and fled without a man to bar the way. 'Toinette was actually ready for such a move, but Eli glided on. And now there took form in her mind some idea of Eli's plan. She saw that he was trying to draw

Amador out, to disarm him, to make their nearness to the door seem of no consequence. Eli moved about so casually that one would have found little reason to suspect that there was aught of design in this alternate edging toward and drawing away from the door. Indeed the door might well not have been there for all it seemed to matter to him. But 'Toinette observed that they never passed near it twice in succession. She wondered if this fact had occurred to Amador. She knew the others had turned their eyes elsewhere. But Amador—had he been fooled? Beneath his inscrutable mask was he as keenly alive as she to what the next minutes meant? Without warning Eli stopped her musing.

"The next time," he whispered, "we go. Jules and Victor are outside already. Placide is alongside the door to the kitchen. He will slip out when we make the turn."

'Toinette's face whitened. Eli noticed it. "It's too late to change your mind now, 'Toinette," he declared sharply.

"I had no thought of changing my mind," she answered nervously. "But Amador—he knows."

"Of course he knows; but he has waited too long. He can't stop us now."

Much too quickly for 'Toinette did they pass the fiddler's perch and make the turn that led toward the

door. She knew it would not take them twenty seconds to reach it. With every step it loomed nearer and nearer. Her lips were dry. Far across the room she caught a glimpse of Placide, his eyes alert. They flashed a message of confidence. His spirit seemed to lay violent hands on her and shake off the sudden fear that was numbing her limbs.

She looked for him again, but he was gone. The door must be near! How near it was . . . ten feet away! And voices . . . had she heard voices there, outside the door? She looked up at Eli. He was listening too. Surely they had been mistaken; Jules and Victor would never be so foolhardy as to raise their voices at such a moment.

Eli must have thought as she did, for she sensed a resumption of that irresistible force that had been carrying forward. But the next second she knew she had not been mistaken . . . there was the sound of voices raised just outside the door—voices that were familiar too, voices that did not belong to either Jules or Victor. She could not hold back the little breathless gasp that forced its way to her lips. Eli's mouth had set in a hard line. But he kept on. It was not necessary for her to ask if he had heard. In a dozen ways he told her, and more plainly than words could have done, that he was steeling himself to spring forward. No matter what happened he would play this thing

through to the end. How worse than useless it was to ask him to wait, to hold back!

Already, in fancy, she could feel him leaping toward the door, dragging her after him, hear Amador's warning cry and see the pack running at them. And just outside the door. . . .? 'Toinette groaned. Was there nothing she could do to avert the tragedy that had already touched her with its icy fingers? Another step would light the spark. Neither Eli nor Placide nor any man could stay it then. Even now it seemed too late for intervention. But there was One, to whom a second was as a year, Who even yet could frustrate Fate.

'Toinette had long since found a quick and certain way to His ear. Beside Him stood the Holy Mother, ever wakeful and ever willing to intercede with Him for such as her. She had asked before and received, and she raised her eyes now to ask that Divine aid again, and as she did, the door opened . . . opened angrily, as though it were a human thing that had caught the pulse of the hand which had flung it back, and Sam Drouillard stalked into the cabin. He was white with snow. Behind him but a step came Xavier.

"Eli. . . .!" 'Toinette gasped as she clutched at him for support. He had recognized father and son, and as he tightened his arm around 'Toinette he turned so that his back was to them. He felt her go limp, and he looked down as if he expected her to faint.

'Toinette could think of nothing but that they had been trapped, their plan discovered and that the Drouillards stood there to bar the way. How tragically the two had marched in out of the night, their jaws red from the gale, the hungry wind screaming at them! She wondered how long they had been waiting outside the door for Eli and her to rush into their arms. And Placide . . . had they caught him? And Victor and Jules? . . . where were they?

Eli caught the little moan of despair which forced itself past her lips. "Don't lose heart," he muttered. "The Drouillards will not stop us."

"No, Eli, we shall never go now," she answered, shaking her head hopelessly, thinking not only of the Drouillards and her grandfather, but of the storm which rocked the cabin with an ever-increasing fury.

"No?" he queried scornfully. "Humph! I tell you we *shall* go!" And he threw his head back as though that ended it and it were folly to pursue the matter further.

CHAPTER XI.

FLIGHT.

XAVIER and his father did not pause to slap the snow from their shoulders. For all their wind-whipped appearance, their blood-shot eyes, and the grotesque and tusk-like icicles, which drooped from Mr. Drouillard's moustache, they brought an air of importance with them . . . of haste . . . of men who had come a long way on matters of great importance, fearful lest they came too late.

The crowd did not fall back before them although the father glared about him as though he expected them to do so. Amador started to drop his fiddle, but the others would not have it so. Protesting cries came from a score. What business had the Drouillards here? . . . they were not wanted.

Father and son were aware of the hostile glances leveled at them; but then, they were used to hostility. Pacifique and most of the others from the bay were in debt to Drouillard Brothers, hence the hostility, Xavier's father argued. It was no more than a man in his position must expect. It mattered but little to him. In fact he was quite content to have things as they were.

Grandfather Chevalier called out a greeting from the far end of the room and began fighting his way through the whirling dancers. He clasped his hands angrily as they buffeted him about. He suspected it was done deliberately, as though they would show him how little importance they attached to Sam Drouillard's presence.

In times past, 'Toinette's grandfather had shared this feeling against the Drouillards; but he was glad to see them to-night. And they must not be shamed, either. He was wise enough to realize that the very ones who were the most resentful would be the last to forget that the richest man among them had actually come to his house, and on important business too. What if they did talk behind his back in the days to come? He was willing to have his name coupled with Sam Drouillard's. He knew how they feared the man, and he realized that fear was quite as good a weapon as respect for attaining one's ends.

Mr. Drouillard caught sight of Grandfather Chevalier, and waved a hand to him; but he was not intent on exchanging greetings with Joe Chevalier. He wanted to see 'Toinette, to have his eyes tell him that she was still there. Xavier was of the same mind. He was not tall, but he stretched out his thin neck until he was able to look over his father's shoulder. He scanned every passing face until he became so absorbed that his mouth hung open.

Eli had circled about him twice already, always hovering near the door; and he had moved so cleverly that his back had always been toward Xavier. His great bulk was an effective shield. His continued nearness finally weighed on the boy, and he stepped forward without warning and saw 'Toinette. His eyes bulged behind their fogged glasses. A dozen times and more on the way to the bay, he had told his father they would not find her there. Now that he saw her, and realized that he had been mistaken, he did not find her white face or apparent anxiety either alarming or surprising. He even dared to smile at her, and stepping back he caught his father's sleeve and pointed her out to him.

"Ah, so there you are!" Mr. Drouillard exclaimed; and he shook a reproving finger at her. "I wondered where you had got to Toinon."

'Toinette did not answer; but he did not ask that. She was here; that was enough. He laughed heartily, as though its volume alone guaranteed its sincerity. He had scoffed at his son's reiterated warning that they came too late, that they would find 'Toinette gone with Captain Labadee. As they had pulled up their team beside the washed-out bridge over Sulphur Creek, Xavier had gone so far as to say that it was Placide's work . . . part of his scheme to keep them from reaching the bay in time.

Mr. Drouillard had called his son a fool and reprimanded him more sharply than he was wont to do. And yet he had feared that the boy was right. So his mirth now was not altogether forced. He could be jovial with very good reason. He rushed toward Grandfather Chevalier shaking his fist in mock anger.

"Say, Joe," he cried, "a man needs a boat to get here to-night! What's the matter with your bridge?"

"That's not my bridge!" Grandfather Chevalier returned in the same spirit.

"No; but I'll charge you with that team if I lose it."

They shook hands, and Mr. Drouillard pushed Xavier forward.

"So that's you, eh, Xavier?" Grandfather Chevalier laughed. He stepped back and ran his eyes over the boy. "All you need now is a mustache, Xavier, and you'll be a man. These pills you've been making must be pretty good. But I guess you don't want to talk about pills to-night, eh?" He grinned knowingly and raising his eyes he swept the room, looking for Toinette. Not seeing her at once, he cried:

"Toinette! Toinette!"

He got no answer, and thinking he had not made himself heard, opened his mouth to cry out at the top of his voice; but before a sound passed his lips the music stopped with a crash. Amador's fiddle clattered

to the floor. They turned to see what was wrong, and as they looked they saw him spring up with a rifle in his hands.

He fired almost instantly, and leaping down from his table rushed to the door and tugged at it savagely.

"They're gone!" he shouted. "They've got 'Toinette! Quick! . . . help me to open the door!"

Grandfather Chevalier's eyes darted around the room. Here were some of Placide's men . . . what could it mean? He could see seven or eight men trying to force the door. "They've put a bar through the latch-guard!" he heard Pacifique shout. He knew this was what they must have done, and still, for the moment, he was helpless to tell them what to do. The Drouillards were speechless, too. The smell of gunpowder in the close room seemed to sicken Xavier. He was staring fixedly at the smoke curling lazily about the lamps.

"The kitchen-door!" some one cried then, and the crowd raced across the room toward it, Amador leading the way. Cleophas, he that Placide had called slow-witted, was standing close to the door. As Amador rushed past he put out his foot and tripped him, and those immediately behind him went down also.

Having halted the pursuit for a moment, Cleophas raised his voice and shouted with a will:

"Hurry! We'll be too late!"

Grandfather Chevalier had shaken off the trance-like

inertia that gripped him. The Drouillards had found their tongues. Soon the crowd was pouring through the kitchen.

"The boats! . . . the boats!" Mr. Drouillard cried. The boats were there . . . many of them; but the oars were not. Vainly they searched in the snow for them. Amador cursed, and Sam Drouillard voiced his dismay vehemently. He ordered the others to do something; but there was nothing they could do. Still unconvinced, he thundered at them as they shrugged their shoulders:

"Are you going to let them get away? Do you mean you intend to do nothing?" Those nearest him glared back angrily, ready to hold him responsible for the whole affair, and frankly unwilling to risk their lives to further his interests. Unmindful of the mutterings and flashing eyes, Mr. Drouillard fairly screamed:

"Man a boat! . . . put a boat in the water and get after them! They're only seventy-five yards out. You can catch them. Don't you see them there?" And he pointed to a rolling smudge of black, dark for a moment against the whiteness of the towering waves.

The mocking wind reduced his words to an unintelligible rumble. No one sprang forward to obey him.

He had often had recourse to the law, and he was at the point of calling out a vain threat when Grandfather Chevalier came running down the beach, an old fowl-ing-piece in his hands.

"They're gone!" Mr. Drouillard exclaimed, his hands raised threateningly as if he would blame this catastrophe on his ally.

Grandfather Chevalier elbowed him out of the way, in such a white rage that he would have turned his gun on him for another word. He sighted the tossing boat, and leveling his gun, fired time after time until his shells were gone.

Even if he had not realized it, the cries of the crowd would have told him that he was wasting his time, that the small boat was well out of range. He tossed the shot-gun away at last, and evidently believing his voice would carry authority where his gun had failed, shouted and scolded and threatened. He called upon God for vengeance, and the next moment blasphemed the Creator for helping them to get away.

Cleophas tried to calm him, but he flung him off and wading waist deep into the water he shook his fist in the direction of the *Heloise* and cursed his own flesh and called upon the world to witness that she should never cross his door again.

Flygette LaPlante, matching the old man's profanity word for word, finally got him back upon the beach.

"Don't fret yourself, Joe," he insisted! "they haven't got away yet. There's only four of them, Victor, Jules, Eli and Placide. The rest are here. Four men can't

take that boat out to-night. We'll see them up on the beach before the night's over."

None of them had stopped to draw on a coat and they shivered as the icy wind and cold spray bit into their perspiring bodies.

"They're putting up a jib," Eugene Malbay announced. "It's all the sail they need. I wouldn't be surprised if they got away."

"In this gale? They'll never clear the Pointe!" Flygette exclaimed, wagging his head wisely. "I've sailed this bay too long; I know what a man can do."

"Placide will not try to clear the Pointe," Eugene answered patiently. "It's well under water, Flygette. Placide will take his boat right over it . . . and with luck, he'll get through."

"*Mon Jee!*" Flygette swore incredulously. "But why not? There's nothing out there but some old twine-reels. I crossed the Pointe myself last spring during the high water."

"Yes, but the *Heloise* is no pond boat; and how can a man hold a course in a blinding wind and storm?" Remy Payette, who has sailed with Placide for three years, exclaimed bitterly. He, in common with the others of the crew who had been set ashore far from home, was in a nasty temper. "Four men," he scoffed, "—do you think they'll go far in such weather? Humph!"

"They have a chance," said Eugene. "I wish them luck."

"So do I," Flygette agreed cautiously after a hurried glance about to see who might be listening. "'Toinette wanted to go. All this talk of stealing her is rubbish. If she loves him, that's enough. He'll make her a better husband than Xavier Drouillard would ever have done."

A tremendous wave broke furiously on the beach and forced them back. Remy laughed contemptuously. "Don't be absurd," he warned, "Placide is not the marrying kind. 'Toinette is not the first woman he has run off with. He never married the others, and he will not marry her."

"And yet I think he will," Eugene declared earnestly, his thin face blue with the cold.

"If he doesn't, he better never come back here!" exclaimed Flygette.

"Don't expect him to come," Remy exclaimed. "I tell you, 'Toinette is just another woman to him . . . a pretty one at that. She'll find out soon enough. Look at the fools now! They'll be on the beach in another minute if they are not careful!"

It was apparent to all that the *Heloise* had lifted her anchor. Sea and wind were carrying her ashore rapidly. Cleophas came up and stood beside Eugene. "My God," he groaned, "they can't turn her; she won't

take the wind. I tell you, we haven't had such a nor'-easter in ten years!"

The others saw this too! A cry ran up and down the beach, and the crowd was suddenly still. They stood tense and expectant, believing the end was but a matter of a few minutes, and as they waited the sharp rattling of tackle-blocks reached their ears, followed at once by pistol-like reports of ropes and stays going taut.

They knew what was happening. They could almost feel the tremble which passed over the *Heloise*; and, unconsciously, they rose up on their toes even as the boat was rising . . . poising, ready to leap away before the first onslaught of the wind. It struck the next instant. The canvas flattened out before it with a noise not unlike the popping of a great paper bag.

"They've got the wind at last!" Cleophas cried, his tone betraying his relief.

Amador glanced at him questioningly. Grandfather Chevalier was only a step away, but he had not heard. His eyes were on the *Heloise*. He shook with rage as he saw her draw away.

"Stop!" he shouted. "I forbid you to go!"

Even at this moment he failed to realize how impotent he was. The *Heloise* was a stout boat. She had the bit in her teeth now, and in less than a minute she had doubled the distance between herself and the shore.

"They're going!—they're going!" he shouted again. "Give me that rifle, Amador! Give it to me!"

Amador shook his head and put the gun behind him. "No, no, Joe," he grumbled, "it's too late for that. If they go, it is not my fault; I warned you, but you were too wise. If I had had my way I wouldn't have missed him. It's no use standing there wasting your breath, Joe. You can yell all you like; you can't stop them now. 'Toinette is gone!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE CALL OF THE LOON.

PLACIDE held 'Toinette in his arms for a brief second when they gained the cabin of the *Heloise*, but although his eyes warmed as he smiled at her, it was only a gesture. For the moment, his thought was not of her; she was aboard his boat as he had planned; that was enough. Only the weather could defeat him now, and it was the weather that engaged his attention. When once he had the *Heloise* out of danger he could turn to 'Toinette. But he could wait. He even found a peculiar pleasure in being forced to wait.

It did not occur to him that there could be any question about her; she was his. He realized the peril of their position and what he had risked in taking her as he had; but he was so certain of the future that even to contemplate it momentarily was enough to assure him no price he might pay could be too high.

Never at any time had he dreamed of attempting to cross the lake this night. He was sailor enough to know that such an effort could end but one way.

Had his boat been fully manned he would not have risked crossing, for he knew the way of these nor'-

easters. The wind was blowing a gale now. It would stiffen hourly, until come daylight, no boat could live in it.

All day long he had known it would blow before evening. He had made his plans accordingly, and Canada had had no place in them. Anything he had said to the contrary had been but fiction, invented for 'Toinette's ears, for he had realized her consent would be more readily gained did the way to the priest appear direct and certain.

Before he had gone ashore he had determined to take advantage of the high water on Bay Pointe. Once across the Pointe, he intended running before the wind. The wide mouth of Ten Mile Creek would be before him. With any luck at all he would be able to slip inside without mishap. There would be plenty of water inside to-night. When he had passed Guard Island, or Odeon Island, he would bring the *Heloise* about. In the lee of the islands he would find a safe anchorage. He'd stay there and ride out the storm.

Eli and he had agreed on this; it seemed practicable, or if short of that, the safest of several courses open to them. Many times in the hours he had been ashore he had weighed the matter carefully, making greater and greater allowances for sea and weather as the wind had continued to freshen, but though thus de-

liberately discounting his chances of success, his confidence had not been shaken.

But the wind had continued to rise; the night had grown thicker and thicker. It had taken the best they had to reach the schooner in the small boat. A tremendous sea was running. The deck of the *Heloise* was awash every other second, every third or fourth wave raking her from stem to stern.

Since coming aboard, Eli and he had not exchanged a word, but he sensed the other's uneasiness. Eli was not easily discouraged by wind or weather, nor was he, and yet he now found himself questioning the wisdom of what he proposed doing.

Down below, the sound of straining timbers filled the air. 'Toinette's eyes were never still. They roved about fearfully in an unseeing search. By the light of the swaying lantern Placide saw the whiteness of her face. "Don't be afraid," he grinned at her, "the *Heloise* is not going down; she's been through worse than this."

'Toinette clutched his arm desperately. "But I *am* afraid, Placide," she cried, her voice quavering pathetically. "We shouldn't have come. No vessel can live in this storm. Do you know what you are doing, Placide?—tell me? If we don't go down, we'll be swept ashore. You know it, Placide—you *know* it!"

He was ready with a denial, but a mountainous

wave struck the schooner with such violence that the words were brushed from his lips as he struggled to keep his balance. It made him pause. The growing doubt that he could keep the *Heloise* off shore when they slipped anchor became formidable.

And he had been so confident! Of a sudden the enterprise seemed little short of madness. As for running the creek . . . he groaned unconsciously at the thought, and his eyes avoided 'Toinette's as though fearful that their indecision and apprehensiveness should reveal at a glance how thin was the armor of the will behind them.

He asked himself what had ever led him to believe he could successfully manage this adventure. What had he counted on to aid him? . . . the night was black as pitch; there wasn't a landmark to help a man hold a course. And the islands themselves, beyond a doubt, were under water. In size they were only motes swimming in the vastness of a great marsh, dignified on the maps by the name of North Maumee Bay, but a marsh for all that, shallow in spots and fit only for punt or rowboat; deep in certain channels, but, in fair weather or foul, not by the widest stretch of the imagination a safe place for a vessel the size of the *Heloise*.

But he had known all this. He knew that to miss the channel which flowed between Guard Island and Odeon Island was to find oneself adrift in a morass

with not so much as a reed to distinguish one spot from another.

On such a night as this the water must have backed up for miles—water enough to float the *Heloise*, too. But she would be open to the full sweep of the gale. It would be next to impossible to hold her. She'd drift and drift until she fetched up in Half-way Creek or one of the twenty or more sloughs which indented the shore. She'd be safe enough there for a few hours. But the water would drop almost as quickly as it had risen, and the *Heloise* would be trapped. She'd stay there to rot or be chopped up for firewood.

Placide's lips were dry as he turned to the door, so clearly had these pictures impinged themselves on his consciousness. He cursed, and called himself a fool for not having long since recognized the hopelessness of what he proposed doing. From across the water, rising above the screaming of the storm and banging of tackle-blocks and the unearthly din below deck, there came to his ears the long, quavering, melancholy call of the loon. His blood chilled. Superstition made a presentiment of evil of that call. Placide vowed that if he ever got the *Heloise* off shore he would not intentionally put his head back into the noose again this night.

Suddenly he realized there was yet time for him to change his mind. He knew what to expect outside;

but he'd have the lake before him; and a stout vessel always has a chance if you can keep water enough under her . . .

He thought of the others and what they might have to say. He was the master, but the others had volunteered for this affair, and they would have a voice in what was done. He knew Jules would agree to anything he proposed. Victor could be convinced. But Eli . . . Eli would be easily turned from the plan they had agreed on, or not be turned at all.

Fired with the desire to have the matter settled at once, he flung back the door and stepped into the companionway.

"Toinette had been watching him intently, for his anxiety had been quickly communicated to her in a dozen ways. A cry, blended of fear and amazement that he could leave her without a word, escaped her as she saw him closing the door. "No, Placide," she pleaded, holding it with all her strength, "don't leave me down here alone. I'm afraid! I can't get my breath, I tell you. Let me go on deck with you."

Her eyes were wild, and the flickering rays of the lamp swinging crazily above her accentuated the deathly pallor of her face. Placide's mouth tightened as he stared at her. She saw and read the changing expression in his eyes for what it was, and she would

have been blind not to sense their ill-concealed impatience.

"You stay below, 'Toinette!" he exclaimed sharply, pushing her back. "You are safe here. Do you want to be washed away?"

There was sense in his words, but 'Toinette was too distraught to realize it. She shook her head madly. "No, no, Placide!" she screamed. "I tell you I can't stand it down here; I can't breathe!"

She lunged at him and caught his arm and clung to it tenaciously as he started to pull the door to. He shook her off roughly. "But you'll do as I say. I know what is best."

"Please, Placide . . . please!" she begged, tears choking her. She reached out for him again. His hand closed over hers, and something in his touch froze her heart. She begged again not to be left below. The tenderness she had come to expect from him was gone, however. He unlaced her fingers and pushed her staggering back halfway across the cabin.

She caught herself as she was falling. Lurching forward, then, she threw herself at the door once more. It was locked! Unreasoning fear swept over her. She screamed and beat the door with her hands, and sunk her nails into the wood . . . but the door was locked . . . Placide had gone!

CHAPTER XIII.

A W A K E N I N G.

SHE had heard Placide run up on deck. But she could not believe that he would leave her so. She called to him again and again. She got no answer. She rattled the door . . . realization came slowly but with cruel finality.

The truth stunned her. She cowered against the door not knowing what to do.

Seconds passed. A great wave struck the cabin and threw her down. Hands to her ears and eyes closed, she picked herself up and waited as the torrent thundered over the roof of the cabin.

As time went on, and the *Heloise* stood up under the blows of the wind and sea, courage, of a sort, came back to her. And yet, every time a wave broke furiously over the cabin, she winced in spite of herself, and the feeling that she was trapped would not down.

For the first time the cabin itself now came under her inspection. It seemed small, bare, uncomfortable and dirty. Scars in the paint revealed underlying colors of many hues, mute testimony of the different tastes of the schooner's long list of owners. Hung

upon a row of nails were the clothes of a sea-faring man. From the protecting folds of an old overcoat Placide's best suit peeked out. The nickeled keyboard of a battered accordion glimmered fitfully in the opposite corner.

Small pictures of women in undress, in tights—dancers, actresses—the whole assortment of photographic premiums given away with a popular cigarette of that day—were tacked upon the walls.

She recoiled before these pictured ladies out of a world about which she knew nothing. But knowledge of them was not necessary; a child would have sensed their boldness. Much that would have appeared crude and immoral to a more sophisticated person would have quite escaped her, because her own life was crude and primitive; but the Church had registered certain impresses on her, and no one of them was so clear-cut, so unalterable, as the heinousness of naked flesh.

To her, and to her people, it was but once removed from lust; the sin incarnate which God could not forgive. She thought nothing of going about barelegged. But there were several kinds of nakedness, and the nakedness of these pictured women was the nakedness of the voluptuary . . . of the fallen and godless.

How natural, then, for her to wonder how these women concerned Placide. Their pictured presence augured some connection, however remote, that took

him out of her world into theirs . . . a world of sin, of silk, of ease, of all that she was a stranger to.

In a vague way, sex had already stirred in her. She had been secretly ashamed, and she had turned from it as from something unclean, not understanding it and not wanting to. And this without priggishness.

Unconsciously she had looked on Placide as she did on Cleophas and the other men she knew so well, quite overlooking the fact that Placide alone had stirred those hidden fires in her. Now, however, she realized how little she really knew him. As for Placide—if he found these ladies attractive, why did he come seeking her? Was it that he looked on her as he must look on them?

The more she pondered the question the more afraid she became, and it was fear that quite transcended the feeling of danger the storm had imposed. Her eyes strayed to the window a foot above her head, and there they met a pictured face that drew a gasp from her. It was a photograph, larger than the others, and scrawled across the bottom of it were the words: "To Placide with love."

It was a pretty face, a trifle hard about the mouth, but young and well cut. The woman's bosom was invitingly bare.

"Toinette's fists clenched as she stood before it. Red spots flamed in her cheeks. Feature by feature she

studied the face, and always her gaze returned to the woman's eyes. In them was the unmistakable light of the huntress, of the woman who fools no man.

The obscene verses on a post-card, tacked to the wall just below the photograph, drilled their way into her consciousness and nauseated her, for though child she was, she realized that this cabin, these pictures, all were revelatory, that she was seeing Placide as he was.

She leaped to the conclusion that it had been this that had arrayed Cleophas and her grandfather and Amador and the others against him.

She hated this pictured face before her—and she hated Placide. The storm no longer existed in her thoughts. She knew she would not go on; she would go ashore if she had to swim. She caught up an overturned chair, and attacked the door so savagely in her anger that the chair fell to pieces.

The stout door resisted her effectually. Anger gave way to rage. Thoroughly disillusioned, hating herself and thinking of nothing but to be free, she climbed upon one of the births and fought to open the window. She struggled with it for two or three minutes before she saw that it was locked. Pressing her face against the glass she tried to pierce the blackness of the night.

The boat was rocking so violently that it was almost impossible for her to maintain her perch. As she stared out across the water the distant flashes of the guns on

shore glowed momentarily in the blackness. Instinctively she knew what was happening, and she put her ear to the glass, trying to catch the reports. Once, so faint that she could not be certain, a muffled boom seemed to come from the shore. The next instant something thudded into the woodwork of the cabin. She did not doubt but what it was a bullet, and she drew back, relaxing her hold.

A mighty wave struck the *Heloise* at the moment, and although 'Toinette reached out to catch herself, she pitched down upon the floor.

The force of her fall so stunned her that several minutes passed before she sat up. A leg of the chair which she had demolished rolled across the floor and beat a tattoo on her back. She picked it up and sat there gazing at the window in a puzzled way. It was some time before she realized that the leg of the chair would make an excellent weapon for breaking the glass. The thought spurred her on, and she got to her feet and managed to reach the window once more.

The first blow broke the glass. The rush of cold air which struck her had a steadying effect. By the greatest of efforts she clung to her position until she removed the pane piece by piece. She did not know just how she was to crawl through and out upon the deck, nor if the opening was large enough to permit her to escape; but she did not hesitate. She got an

arm through first; her head followed, and by a seeming miracle, the other arm and her shoulders.

The thunder of cascading water warned her that another wave was sweeping the boat; but for the moment she was helpless; and she closed her eyes and waited resignedly for the worst to happen. A second later, half drowned, she drew the cold air into her lungs again. She was well aware that a minute or two would bring another wall of water down upon her. At first she considered wriggling back into the cabin, but she found her body so tightly wedged in the opening that she could not back up. To go ahead seemed equally impossible, but the knowledge that each passing second lessened her chance of life spurred her on to renewed effort. She threw her body around madly. The copper sash cut through her clothes and stung her flesh. She knew better than to waste her strength calling for help.

She had almost despaired of ever getting free of the trap into which she had crawled, when her wildly threshing hands caught and held a loose end of rope swinging back and forth across the deck. She tugged at it with all her strength. The rope held. It gave her the purchase she had lacked before. The scalding sting of the knife-like edge of the window's copper collar began to travel down her body, and she knew she progressed.

She rested for a brief moment and summoned strength and courage for a final effort. It was not needed, for she slipped through so easily that she sprawled upon the deck. Her ears, rather than her eyes, warned her that a great sea was swooping toward her. She got to her feet and leaped for the mainmast in time to twine her legs and arms around the halyards before the foaming water struck her. With eyes open she watched it sweep by, its thousand hands plucking at her. Cheated of her, it poured through the cabin window with a blood-curdling gurgle.

When it had passed, and left her safe for the moment, she turned her eyes toward shore, but all was blackness there. She knew the vessel was not yet under way. Once she thought she heard distant shouting; but the sound did not come again.

Placide and the others were still up forward. Surely at least one of them would not fail her; they were loyal to Placide, but they could not refuse to put her ashore. Of them all, Eli would be the one to take her part. Twenty years he had been coming to the bay. She thought of that as she ran forward. . . .

CHAPTER XIV.

WIND AND SEA.

'**T**OINETTE saw them before they saw her . . . four white figures huddled together about the knightheads, a flickering lantern laying grotesque shadows upon their faces. Eli and Placide were shouting at each other. Placide's back was toward her, but even so she could sense the rage which gripped him. Eli's eyes were sullen and unafraid as he faced the man he had followed so long.

"You're thinking of your boat, and not of us," he cried. "I'm not afraid of any man, nor storm, but I'm not fool enough to believe the *Heloise* can face this sea. If we run inside, we've got a chance. Perhaps we can save the boat, too. That's what we agreed on when we offered to come . . . to run inside! Only worse than fools would talk of crossing the lake to-night!"

"Fools, eh? I tell you it's the fool who doesn't dare to change his mind. I had no thought of crossing to-night. The three of you know that. That was for 'Toinette. Three hours ago we could have run inside; but not now. Did any of us believe this storm

would be so bad? No! We laughed at it. Well, we don't laugh now. Canada . . . humph! I'm not thinking of Canada. We can stand outside for five or ten miles and point for Toledo. We'll be all right if we reach the Maumee."

A warning cry from Victor sent them running to safety. "Toinette interpreted the cry correctly, but for the moment she was helpless. Placide's frank admission that he had lied to her, that the lives of all were in danger, had as numbing an effect on her as the cold. The second which she wasted left her at the mercy of the onsweeping wave. She screamed at sight of it.

Victor was nearest. He lunged for her without a moment's hesitation, lost his footing, struggled violently to catch himself, and then rolled helplessly across the deck.

Placide had turned too. He shouted and leaped for her. His arm circled her waist, and swept her on with him in his rush. Eli groaned so loudly that 'Toinette heard him above the roaring of the water. Plainly enough his voice said he believed them lost; and in that moment of anguish, it seemed to 'Toinette that naught could save them.

Placide knew what he was about, however; the star-board shrouds were just ahead of him. He threw out his right arm, caught the topmast-backstays, swung

in under them to the shrouds and scrambled up the ratlines as the roaring sea swept past.

Eli shouted encouragingly. 'Toinette's eyes were open. For a brief second she had a glimpse of Victor's fear-constricted face. The surging wave had picked him up. It threw him into the air and bore him along as though he were a cork. His mouth was open wide. His eyes were popping from their sockets. Death was staring at him . . . and he knew it.

The agony written on that white face strangled 'Toinette. She tried to cry out, but no sound issued from her dry throat. She looked again, and Victor was gone. Placide tossed her to Eli, snatched the lantern away from him and ran aft.

He was back presently, his mouth set and cold. "Victor's gone," he said simply.

Eli nodded. Jules turned away without a word. He crossed himself. He had heard the loon's mournful call, and knew that it was for one of them. Victor's passing but emphasized again the unfailing prescience of that grim harbinger of death and disaster.

'Toinette was crying hysterically, her overwrought nerves crumbling. Eli spoke to her, but she did not hear him. Placide stepped toward her. He seemed to realize only now that he had left her locked in the cabin, that she was here on deck where he had forbidden her to come. His puzzled expression passed,

and one of violent rage followed. He reached out and caught her roughly, but she clung to Eli.

The man's defiance further infuriated Placide. "She's mine!" he exclaimed. "She'll do what I say; and so will you, Eli. I know what is best. You saw what happened to Victor . . . My God! but for me it would have been her, too. If you'd done as I said, Victor would be here now."

"One of us had to go," Jules muttered bitterly.

Placide laughed at him. "So you believe that fairy-tale, eh? Why do you tremble, Jules? Are you afraid? And you, Eli . . . what's come over you. Are you the men who have sailed with me? I wouldn't know you, to look at you! Does an old woman's tale unnerve you so? I've heard the loon before; I'm still here; I'm not afraid!"

His voice carried conviction, but he wondered at his own temerity, for in his heart he bowed to every superstition of the sea. But he had done things with a flourish so long that he easily slipped back into his old manner and took courage from it. He twirled Toinette around so that she faced him.

"And you, my lady," he exclaimed mockingly, "you defy me, too, as these others do. I warned you not to come on deck; do you think I asked these men to risk their lives for nothing? I leave you locked below, and yet you are here. How do you explain it?"

'Toinette winced as his fingers sunk into her arm.

"No, no, Placide!" she cried, "don't hurt me. I broke the window . . . I crawled through. I want to go ashore; I want to go home! Oh, don't . . . don't hurt me . . . *Eli!*"

Eli brought his fist down on Placide's arm and knocked it away. "That's enough," he growled. "You can't hurt her."

Placide caught her again. "Don't raise your hand to me, Eli," he said menacingly. "You need me, and I need you to-night. You'll take orders from me. As for going ashore . . . you're not mad enough to think I'll consent to that?"

Eli shook his head. "I am not a fool," said he, and to 'Toinette: "It's death to try it, 'Toinette. Placide is right; you must go with us now. You wanted to come . . . you love him. . . ."

"No, Eli, no! I've changed my mind . . . I want to go home! Don't make me go with you."

She lifted her eyes pleadingly to his and beseeched him to aid her.

Eli was not unmoved. Her saying she no longer loved Placide rather surprised him, but it did not leave him aghast; for he, in his way, was not without some knowledge of women, and he surmised that 'Toinette's change of heart was due to some belated misgiving about Placide's promise to marry her. He knew

Placide had played with her, as he had seen him play with other girls, that he had no thought of marrying her.

Ordinarily Eli would have considered it no affair of his, but events had so shaped themselves to-night that he found rather a self-righteous pleasure in becoming her champion. Never for a moment did it occur to him that 'Toinette's innocence or his fondness for her had aught to do with this sudden determination to see that Placide married her as he had promised. But these things did make a difference, whether or not he recognized it.

As he glanced at 'Toinette there came to him a memory of her as a black-haired babe (he had seen her grow from babyhood to the robust young woman she was to-day), and the memory started a train of thought which brought him to her grandfather.

Eli was not without a sense of affection for Joe Chevalier. Even casual acquaintances of twenty years' standing have much in common, and Joe and he had been more than that to each other. This had not prevented him from aiding 'Toinette, nor would it, in itself, have led him to defy Placide. But it helped. The deciding factor was nothing so much as the compounded interest on eight years of almost unconscious resentment of the other's authority. It carried him off his feet, and his voice shook strangely when he spoke.

"Don't worry, 'Toinette," he exclaimed, "Placide will marry you. I promise you that."

Placide laughed and shook his head quite as one does with a faithful but headstrong child. Eli did not even glance at him. 'Toinette's changing expression held his entire attention.

"But, Eli," she insisted, "I do not want him to marry me . . . I just want to . . ."

"You don't want to marry him?" He cut her off abruptly, his tone incredulous. He had been so sure. He stared at her sharply as if doubting his senses. "You . . . you knew this was only a lark, then, eh?" he demanded, and his voice carried an angry threat. He felt himself fooled, baffled.

'Toinette met his eyes bravely. "I . . . I didn't know, Eli; but I . . . I know now."

"You didn't know, eh?" Placide laughed tauntingly. "You are too innocent, my lady." His white teeth gleamed as he grinned. His manner changed then. "But you know now, 'Toinette? . . . I'm glad you do. I tell you, I wouldn't put you ashore if I could. You are going with us, and we are going now; we've wasted too much time already."

Before Eli could prevent him he reached out and plucked her away from him, and kissed her deliberately. 'Toinette clawed his face, but he did not mind. He even laughed.

Eli lunged at him angrily. Jules leaped forward too. He caught Eli around the middle and swung him back. "We've had enough of this," he shouted. "I've no mind to join Victor. You'll do as Placide says. To-morrow you can have your say. You're as bad as the girl; if you had anything to say you should have said it while we were ashore."

This threw Eli into a towering rage. "So the two of you are against me, eh? That for that!" he scoffed. "No man tells me what to say and when to say it. But I'll wait; to-morrow will do for me."

"To-morrow it is, then," Placide agreed.

"But you keep your hands off her until then," Eli warned.

"You wring no promise out of me," Placide flared back. "We'll be lucky to be alive to-morrow; you know that as well as I. But this isn't the first tight squeeze we've been in together. We can make it if you'll lend a hand; our affairs can be settled later. But with you or without you, I'll take the *Heloise* out of here before the minute is gone. For the last time, I'm asking you if you'll lend a hand?"

Toinette was fighting valiantly to get free of him, but he had swept her off her feet, and he held her arms and legs so tightly that all her squirming was of no avail. Her struggling, added to the violent pitching of the schooner, made it difficult for him to keep his

footing. He braced himself, however, and faced Eli truculently. His manner said almost too plainly that he was counting on eight years of obedience to win the day for him now.

Eli looked from one to the other as he hesitated over his answer. Undoubtedly the habit of his long days of service tempered his reasoning, but he also realized the folly of tarrying there longer. He answered at last. "I'll go," said he.

Placide fatuously believed he had cowed the man. His old arrogance returned to him. "Get an axe and stand by," he ordered. "When I signal with the lantern cut the cable. And you, Jules, run up the jib. Double reefs. I want just canvas enough to give her headway. Get ready."

He took the lantern from Eli, and with 'Toinette in his arms, ran aft. 'Toinette pleaded and stormed at him, but he was deaf to her entreaties. He opened the cabin door to find the place waist-deep in water. The schooner trembled as another wave swept her. He waited until she had shaken it off. Pulling the blankets from his berth, he wrapped them around 'Toinette and ran to the wheel-house.

CHAPTER XV.

WINE OF LIFE.

THE wheel-house on the *Heloise* was nothing more than a crude three-sided shelter built over the wheel and compass-box, and open to the full sweep of the wind as the vessel now lay. As soon as they reached it, Placide caught up a length of rope and fastened it around 'Toinette's waist; and then, to her amazement, passed it around his own body, and, in turn, lashed it fast to the wheel-post. He threw himself back, carrying 'Toinette with him, as he tested the rope. It held. He did not stop to address her. He lifted the lantern and swung it back and forth.

It seemed to 'Toinette that the timbers beneath her feet winced. Almost immediately the vessel began to roll more violently. Eli had cut the cables as ordered; Jules had done his part; but still the *Heloise* wallowed in the trough of the seas. In that second or two she was swept no less than seventy-five yards toward shore.

Placide looked aloft, forgetting he had no sail up save the doubled-reefed jib. He continued to throw down the wheel, but the vessel would not pay off. He

opened his mouth to bawl out an order to Jules, but before he could speak the jib filled and went taut with a report as sharp as the crack of a rifle. The *Heloise* lifted as though she would leave the water. Every line and stay was singing. She was taking the seas broadside now. One struck her and helped to keel her over. She came back slowly, her sticks in place, her rigging as right as ever. She began to gather speed. Placide spoke to her and petted the wheel as fondly as though he were stroking a woman's cheek.

'Toinette did not think it strange. The wind no longer found its way so easily into the wheel-house. She was cold, but not so cold as she had been. The blood of her wild, fierce, combat-loving ancestors began to assert itself. Blood, folklore, environment, every fashioning influence she had ever known had made a virtue of overcoming the elements. In a conscious, but surprised way, she found herself thrilling to the moment.

She glanced at Placide. His mittens did not conceal the strength of his hands, the bulging of his fine muscles. He had fastened the lantern to the compass-box. Whenever he bent over she could catch a glimpse of his face, his eyes overly bright and his nostrils lifted as though he would smell out the weather ahead of him. This was the Placide she had visioned, and loved; and not strangely, she found something magnificent

about him as he stood there so defiant and so self-confident, swaying to and fro with the roll of the vessel and seemingly unmindful of the bundled figure he tugged to and fro with him.

It was this very viking-like quality which had first won her to him; and she was not insensible to it now. That he ignored her, or rather, was oblivious of her presence, mattered not to her; women of her race had always been ignored at such moments by their men. Unbelievable as it may seem, she actually began to glory in his success. The emotional appeal of the man in such circumstances was irresistible. It carried her away; and yet, she told herself she loved him no more . . . that she could never love him again. But she no longer hated him.

Placide often posed, but he was not play-acting now. Any thought of self or danger had passed. He was alive . . . living as he had always wanted to live . . . at grips with sea and storm; laughing at them, defying them, daring them to do their worst, knowing that he was licking them at their own game.

He no longer slapped the wet snow from his face impatiently; its icy kiss could not reach him. He knew 'Toinette was there beside him, that she was the prize for which he played, and a great stake too, but it was the game rather than the reward that was turning his head and making a madman of him.

Already they were five miles off-shore. In less than half an hour they would have quartered enough. Then, with the wind behind them, they'd romp into Toledo. He laughed intoxicatedly. . . . The *Heloise* was as good as ever; what could stop them now? He opened his mouth and sang; raised his voice again and again until it boomed above the storm.

His choice of song, "*Voici le Redempteur*," a chanson seldom heard at other times than Christmas Eve, was ghastly, their situation considered, for he made of it a wild, roystering chantey that profaned its sacred words and mocked the Christ whom it was intended to acclaim.

'Toinette gasped and stared at him nervously, wondering if he were really mad. She had heard of men struck dead for no greater sacrilege. She glanced heavenward time after time as Placide sang on, as though she expected the hand of God to swoop down out of the sky and smite him. That he was spared was but another proof of that Divine mercy which is ever all-forgiving.

Such a sublime example was not lost on 'Toinette. It awakened the maternal instinct in her, and she saw Placide in a new light. She pitied him, forgave him, and as he roared his song, she closed her eyes in prayer; not for herself, but for him; humbly petitioning the

Holy Mother to intercede, to save him, to soften his heart that he might repent in his own way.

The snow and spray had soaked the blankets he had wrapped around her and turned them into a stiff and icy shroud. The cold ate into her until her arms and legs no longer obeyed, and her lips jerked stiffly.

Eventually Placide stopped singing and fell to talking aloud to himself. 'Toinette heard him half consciously, but made no effort to understand what he said. Without warning, he addressed her. "You all right, 'Toinette?" he mumbled.

She nodded slowly, searching his eyes. "Course you are all right," he replied, fumbling with his pocket. His voice was as thick as a drunken man's. He mused to himself for a moment. Then suddenly:

"That Victor was a terrible fool, eh? getting washed away like that?" He chuckled in a mad way. "He's on his way to Joe Chevalier for the last time now . . . Ha! I wonder what that Delphine Roubideaux will say?"

He finally got out of his pocket the flask for which he had been searching. He held it to his lips and half emptied it. He passed it to her then. "Drink that, 'Toinette," he ordered; "it will make you warm. We're going to get wet when we get the wind in back of us. You drink all that brandy; it'll do you good."

CHAPTER XVI.

DERELICT.

THE brandy did not make 'Toinette feel drowsy, as it usually did. Several times she started to speak to Placide, but she failed to find words to voice the questions she would ask. Her eyes did not leave him, though, and it was as if she would make known what she wanted to say without resorting to words . . . How far had they come? How much longer would they have to face that terrible wind?

Placide did turn and flash a questioning look at her. But it was to see if there was something she could clutch. The walls of the wheel-house were bare. "Grab my leg," he shouted; "I'm going to send her into the wind; we're going to run for it, now!"

She obeyed without question. She saw the wheel spin and heard Placide grunt as he fought to keep it from going all the way down. The wind fairly picked the *Heloise* out of the water and threw her ahead. The suddenness and force of the onslaught sent 'Toinette sprawling. But she was up immediately, her bruised body forgotten in her fear.

Placide wiped his mouth with the back of his mitten and chuckled crazily. "We're going to fly, 'Toinette. I told you she was a stout boat."

Stout she was, indeed; but as 'Toinette felt the vessel quiver and heard the whining of the shrouds she wondered just how long it would be before they found themselves struggling in the black, greedy water. The gale bore the schooner along as though she were a chip on a flood, but the waves raced past her even so; great mountainous waves that hung in mid-air, grew top-heavy and fell upon her in a raging torrent.

'Toinette got to counting the time of their coming. One-two-three—up to thirty-one (the beat of her counting approximating the passing of seconds) and then the deluge. They tore at the flimsy wheel-house, wrenched and battered it. She knew it must be torn away, that wood and nails could not withstand such assault forever.

Placide read her thought. "It's stout, I tell you; as good as ever!"

A moment later the frail roof buckled, lifted, unseen hands plucked it up and whipped it away as cleanly, as neatly as though it had been sliced off with a knife. Placide knew what was coming. He drew 'Toinette down beside the wheel. The next wave that fell on them squashed the remaining walls, tore them loose from their fastenings; ripping, splintering the tough

planks and sucking the fragments along with it in its wild ride.

Fire burned in 'Toinette's head where a spike had passed. She put up a blue hand, and brought it down wet. She couldn't see. She put her hand to her mouth and the salty taste of it on her lips told her it was covered with blood.

Placide saw. "A nail," he told her; and then to appear unshaken: "That's better now; I can get a breath of air."

'Toinette shook her head. So he was really mad! Death could not be far away. Was she to die? she asked herself. She had seen death; she had been present when death had taken Suzanne Rivot, Cleophas' cousin. Death meant candles, one at each end of the coffin; more candles in the white church at Vienna; Father Braire very solemn in his white robe; the gathering of friends one had not seen in months; hushed voices; living and eating in the kitchen. For the dead, a last dressing in one's best clothes; a line or two in the newspaper at Monroe . . . and flowers; snowballs in early summer, marigolds and asters in the fall.

M. Grimaud, the undertaker, always drove over from Monroe, his black wagon either white with dust or covered with mud; and his long green coat travel-stained, except in summer when he wore a linen "duster" over it. He had soiled his white gloves when he

came to bury Suzanne. 'Toinette had washed them for him and tried them on surreptitiously. She remembered that, now.

M. Grimaud would come for her. . . . But would he? Perhaps there would be nothing to come for. And the notice in the paper, who was to pay for that? Her grandfather? Would Grandfather Chevalier forgive her so completely as that? She had no "best" clothes; there was not that to soften the thought of death in her mind. But there would be flowers. Cleophas would bring them, and Eugene—Eugene Malbay, with his sad eyes and long white fingers might write some verses about her.

'Toinette prayed. But not so glibly as one would suppose. For although her stock of prayers was great, now, that death seemed so imminent, she found little need of prayer. And if the truth must be told, she viewed regretfully her impending flight to that familiar, angel-inhabited shore of her dreams.

But the *Heloise* did not go down. Indeed, she seemed to have caught the rhythm of the tremendous agony of the sea. Her speed had increased. 'Toinette found now that she could count to forty-two in the intervals between being drenched. It was growing perceptibly colder; the snow was no longer wet as it struck her face. She put her hand up to the back of her head again. The wound was not bleeding so freely now.

Still, these were minor matters, hardly of the calibre to fan into flame the almost extinguished spark of hope in her breast. And yet, the thought lodged in her mind that the *Heloise* might make the Maumee safely. There was nothing in her way; she had a clear course.

Yes, that was it, nothing in the way, 'Toinette mused; no one to help them. There was Turtle Island, of course; a scant three acres of rocky beach, with a small grove of trees at one end of the island, and in the center of it the bald white lighthouse running up into the air. Yachtsmen often dropped anchor there in summer. Captain Haynes, the keeper, was well-liked. It was fun to climb the circular stairs to the light itself and watch him maneuver it. He was always willing to oblige his visitors, especially his young ones.

Captain Haynes was a good man. He and his son, Carson, had rescued the crew of the freighter *Dean Richmond* when that vessel had gone down early that very fall in just such a blow as this. 'Toinette caught herself wishing father and son were there to help them. But navigation had closed for the year. Captain Haynes had locked up the light and gone to Toledo for the winter. He would not be back before April.

Yes, there was nothing in the way. All the *Heloise* had to do was hold together until they passed Presque

Isle, at the mouth of the Maumee. That was all. It sounded simple enough. But a lie hid in the words. They leered at 'Toinette and mocked her. What if the *Heloise* did not hold together? Find the fool willing to believe she could hold together!

She knew they must be a long way offshore. She wondered how deep the water was beneath her. It must be very deep. One would go down and down. And yet, men drown in two fathoms as easily as in twenty.

Was that some one shouting? It *was* a man's voice. It was Eli. He was swinging a lantern frantically. She shook her head as one does in throwing off the cobwebs of a dream. The cry did not come again, but she saw the waving lantern. She grabbed Placide's arm savagely. He threw her hand away. She could see him setting himself for something terrific. Why is it that sculptors do not see men at such moments?

'Toinette wanted to shout, to cry out. But now was no time for little words. A giant had imposed a barrier. The *Heloise* stopped. All of her stopped—sticks, stays, hull—stopped in her tracks, sick, whimpering, trembling: a tired horse at the end of her days. Aloft, another giant brought down his fist. From wheel to knightheads the *Heloise* was swept clean.

Masts, booms, canvas, rigging—the gear that marks the difference between ship and hulk—gone! torn away.

Only the nauseated, unconscious hulk was left . . . bleeding to death on the bosom of another wanderer of the watery lanes, the greasy, green shell of the *Dean Richmond*. Mortal hands would never unlock those two. The *Heloise* rode up over the side of the other, her stern down, bow up in the air.

Placide was slashing with his knife. Then he was dragging 'Toinette with him up the hill of deck. And he cursed and he prayed; and he ran the gamut of human emotion. And he did it with two words . . . the name of the son of God! Hatred, fear, supplication, agony, all answered to that name. How eloquently they sufficed . . . *Jesus Christ!*

A lantern and a man slithered down the wet deck from the starboard hawse-hole. It was Eli. Jules followed him, garrulous and terribly excited. Words flowed from his lips; yet he was not eloquent. They were tiny blows.

Placide held his head up to receive them like a fighter does who has drawn his opponent out and knows he has nothing further to fear. It dribbled into Placide's head that he had run down the floating wreck of the *Dean Richmond*, that the *Heloise* had a hole three feet wide in her starboard bow.

He could feel the vessel settling as the water poured

into her. He knew it would not be long before the two hulks, still locked together, would roll over and plunge to the bottom.

Placide thought to look at Eli. How much better he stood it than Jules. Well, that was the margin of difference between them. The man had not said a word. He had his lantern up to 'Toinette's head now, examining the wound which showed a congealed smear of blood. Placide spoke to him. "How far off Turtle Island do you think we are?"

Eli shrugged his shoulders. "You're the master," he said heavily.

"Your guess is as good as mine. That's all we've got left, a guess."

"The *Dean Richmond* is hull up. She's been in the mud for two months and more. She may not have drifted far."

Placide grunted skeptically, "—and she may have drifted ten miles. We'll put a boat over and chance the rest."

The manner in which the two vessels had piled up left a little V on the leeward side. It was a black hole in which the water alternately lifted and fell a distance of twelve to fifteen feet, bubbling up and sucking down with a dreadful swish.

"We can't put a boat out," Jules challenged. No one bothered to answer him. From some place he had

fetched a life-preserver. He offered it to 'Toinette. Eli grabbed it and threw it overboard. Jules yelled.

"She's better off without that damn thing to drag her down," Eli muttered. Placide agreed.

They got the boat ready then, stowed the oars and beckoned to 'Toinette. How deep that well of water looked! They put her in the boat, tied a length of rope around her waist and fastened the other end through the gunwale.

"Lie down. Don't get up no matter what happens," Placide warned. "We'll get her away as soon as she hits the water."

They began to lower the small boat then, intent on letting her go down when the water fell and themselves being ready to jump aboard and push off when she came up. Jules and Eli were at the bow, Placide at the stern. Down, down 'Toinette felt the frail thing drop. It grew quiet. There were sounds about her—the hiss and scream of the sea, the wrenching of timbers, the thunder of water, the shouting of men! But how dwarfed they were now. A new sound had joined that ribald band. It was the sound of silence; and it was an awful sound. It hushed and mocked its fellows; for it was also the sound of death, the sound that stops the heart and reaches the soul.

Up the little boat popped then, a stretch of gunwale torn away as it rubbed shoulders with its ill-fated

mother. Placide was ready. He leaped, got aboard safely and then turned to hold the tiny craft away from the wet hull that would crush it. He slipped; went down between the two boats. 'Toinette heard the bones in his leg crunch as the yawl struck the schooner. In some way she caught him, yanked at him, tugged, pulled him down beside her.

The boat was dropping again. Unseen hands plucked her up and whirled her around. The *Heloise* was ten feet away. Placide had dragged himself erect. He was at the oars. He held the yawl's nose away from the wind. The ten feet became twenty.

"Eli, Jules!" 'Toinette cried. "We can't leave them. *No, Placide!*"

Placide did not have to answer. There was Eli's voice coming down the wind to them, hoarse and heavy. "Don't come back, you fool! Go on! We'll be all right till daylight!"

Was that Jules sobbing? Perhaps.

CHAPTER XVII.

“A DISTANT SHORE.”

LIKE a frightened swan the yawl swooped down into abyss after abyss, gathered speed always and swept valiantly up and over the black watery mountains which continually barred the way. 'Toinette, sprawled out on the bottom of the boat, could not see the towering walls about her nor glimpse the chutes, down which they plunged, for it was darker than ever. But she knew without seeing; knew better, perhaps, than if she had seen.

Her wet clothes clung to her, cold and clammy. The spray that drenched her turned the snow in the bottom of the yawl to slush, and it surged past her in a murky little flood, forward and aft in turn, as the boat plunged and lifted. She wondered what God's purpose could be in keeping them afloat, in continuing this awful agony. She was no longer hungry for life. Another hour could mean nothing to either of them. Surely such a cockle-shell could not withstand this buffeting for long. She knew Placide was badly hurt. He must be in great pain to groan so. It was like a bell tolling

the knell of their passing . . . a bell at sea. And surely there is no more terrible sound.

She realized now that Eli and Jules were gone. First, Victor; now Eli and Jules. Three of them! But for her they would be dancing at Joe Chevalier—gay, comfortably drunk, with not a care in the world. She was to blame; she had let Placide do this thing. Well, she would pay willingly; purgatory was for such as her. Strangely she gave no thought to what Heavenly disposition had been made of those three good men and true whose untimely passing she must expiate. Indeed she could only think of herself back on the Bay, watching men coming ashore, and seeking in vain for their familiar faces.

She recalled herself with a start; she missed something; Placide's moaning. She put out her hand quickly, searching for his feet, afraid that he had slipped overboard. He was there. He spoke to her, crossly, bade her lie down.

"Your leg, Placide?" she demanded.

"Don't hurt so much now," he answered gruffly.

She didn't pursue the conversation. Latter, distant booming, like, and yet unlike, the sounds about her, reached her ears. The sound grew. She wondered if Placide heard it. A dozen times she started to ask him, but she could not nerve herself to face his ridicule.

But that was the booming of surf. As she waited,

half rising in her excitement, the boat lurched and shipped water madly. She cried out then and clutched at his feet. She got no answer. She shouted again, and without waiting for him to reply crawled back beside him, searching blindly for his face. His head was down, sagging. He still clutched the oar in his hands, but his arms were limp. She got the oar away from him and put her strength on it. The yawl righted itself and sped on. She could not spare a hand to search for signs of life in him. He could not be dead; pain had mastered him and he had slipped into unconsciousness; but not dead. She did not ask, nor could she have told, from what her confidence sprang. It was founded on something too intangible for telling. And yet she was so sure that she found a warming thrill in the thought that she was doing for him what he had not been able to do for her. There was land ahead; there was no questioning it. Only the pounding of surf could explain that booming, which was louder than ever now. She had not the least idea where they were. It mattered little. Land was land, no matter where she found it.

It seemed long (it was really less than five minutes) when the yawl plunged down the smooth side of a great wave and began to pitch violently. 'Toinette waited for the expected climb up the next wave; it did not come. Water poured over her. The yawl was full to

the gunwales. It staggered along drunkenly. The oar was torn out of her hands. The boat was broadside to the wind now.

She caught Placide and held him, fearful lest he be washed away. It seemed that bow and stern were going in different directions at the same time, lifting, falling, lifting. Not the plunging down into deep watery caverns with the closely following sweep upward that she had come to expect, but quick, unexpected descents and even more sudden pitching upward.

Without warning something caught the yawl and threw it—no other word would quite so well describe it—threw it thirty feet forward. "Toinette caught her breath. Even then it was happening again. The yawl struck something. The impact hurled them flat. They were in the water. There was bottom—land! Waist-deep in the black flood she stood and tugged at Placide. The water was racing out now. She could feel it against her limbs! could hear it sucking at the foundered yawl.

She braced herself—dug her feet into the sand and hung on. She drew breath into her lungs as she felt the strength of the ebb lessen. What a load he was. Drag, drag! The next wave caught them, knocked her off her feet; but she held fast to Placide. For twenty feet they rode. Once more the ebb pulled at her.

She was half free of it, though. It couldn't drag her back now.

'Toinette knew what was coming, and was ready for it. Slap, slap! Tiny blows in comparison . . . water flooding by them; leaving them . . . Placide and she lying on a rocky beach, his head in her lap. The waves rolled up, whipping their spume into her face, as she lay there. She wanted to laugh at them.

She knew she must not tarry there . . . Placide's head hung so heavily against her. She pulled herself to a sitting position. It was a great effort. She must get him further up the beach and go off in search of help. Somewhere within her she must find the reserve strength to do this. She knew her part well enough . . . If only the need of haste were not so urgent!

Grunting like a laborer, she dragged him free of the water and stood over him, swaying dizzily. "Placide?" she questioned, and got no answer. She turned away at that without bending down to see if she could discover any sign of life in him. The curtain of snow closed about her as she wandered off, traveling with the wind because that way was easiest. The rocky beach was left behind and she came to fairly level ground. She did not quicken her pace, however. She had not come over thirty yards, but already each step was a task so trying that the accomplishing of it left her marvelling that she was able to take another.

In those moments she must have realized the hopelessness of her task. Help, to be in time, had to come quickly, had to be near, painfully near. And yet she went on, bent over, doggedly, unthinkingly, a peasant clod plodding on to the end of the furrow because it was in the bone and fiber of her to plod on, to give up never. But the floundering trail she left behind her in the deep snow spoke eloquently of the price of her effort.

Just how she was to find Placide again did not occur to her. There was no encouraging light from farm house or shanty to beckon her on. She might well have failed to see a light had there been one, for she ploughed on with head bent down and eyes half closed. She was pleasantly aware of her blood warming through her exertion. Some of the stiffness left her body. She believed she progressed more rapidly, but the difference was negligible. Less than five minutes later a wall loomed ahead of her. She put out her hands and ran them over it. It was a stone-wall. She followed it and came to a window. She found herself at a corner then. She was out of the wind as soon as she turned it. Ten feet more brought her to a door. She banged on it heavily. All was still within. Several times she tried it without raising an answer.

She could not go on for a minute. There were no deserted houses in that country; some one must be there.

The noise of the storm was great. Perhaps they had not heard her calls. A bedroom window would serve her better than the door. So, she fought off despair.

Continuing around the house she found something rising up into the air, white even in the blackness of the night. She lifted her head and let her eyes run up with the round thing. It was the light! They had come ashore on Turtle Island. No wonder no one had answered her cry. A deserted house . . . that was all she had found. But that was something.

She found a window, unlatched its board shutters and began searching in the snow for a rock with which to smash the glass. She got in easily enough. It did not take her long to discover that she was in the kitchen. Ten minutes passed, however, before she found a match. Then a lamp . . . light! There was a neat pile of wood behind the stove. She built a fire, searched for a lantern, put a kettle of water on the stove to heat. In the bedroom she found a varied assortment of male attire. She caught up an armful and trudged back to the kitchen, where she undressed beside the glowing stove, dried her body and slipped into the strange garments. One of Captain Haynes' cast off oilskin coats hung on a nail in back of the kitchen door. She got into it. How big it was!

The kitchen was getting warm. It was not easy to leave it for the cutting cold outside. She accepted

it as another duty, and picking up the lantern, unfastened the kitchen door and stepped out into the snow and wind.

She tried to find her trail, but the falling snow had obliterated it. She knew she had come with the wind, so back into it she must go now. She wondered how long it had been since she had left Placide. Half an hour? Surely longer than that. She was stronger now, though, and she went floundering ahead with savage determination. She came to the beach at last. Placide was not there. Had the snow covered him? She searched with her lantern, but the hummocks in the white mantle that wrapped the beach hid only great boulders.

And yet he could not have slipped back into the water. He must be somewhere along the beach. Swinging her lantern from side to side she went on to her right. She shouted as loud as she could every few seconds; but though she covered at least one hundred and fifty yards, she neither found nor heard any sign or sound that might lead her to him.

He could hardly be farther off in this direction. She was sure she had come the wrong way, and was about to retrace her steps when she thought she heard her name called. She answered at once and waited to see if she had been mistaken. The response was immediate. A few seconds later she found him. He had not moved

from the spot where she had left him. She held the lantern up to his face.

Gratitude beamed in his bloodshot eyes.

"You are alive; you are better, eh, Placide?" she demanded anxiously.

"I fainted, huh?"

'Toinette nodded and put her hand on his forehead. It was warm. "You can't walk, Placide?" she queried.

The lantern fascinated him. "Those clothes, and that lantern . . . you found a house? Turtle Island, I guess eh? No one here?"

"I broke the window. I made a fire before I started back. If you could only walk. I can't carry you, Placide."

"Help me up. If I can get my arm around your neck maybe we can make it. My leg must be broken in two or three places."

Every move wrung a cry of pain from him. He urged her on, however. When she got him erect it seemed that his weight must drag her to her knees. Yet, a step at a time, they left the beach. 'Toinette was just beginning to feel that she might succeed in getting him to the house when she fell. The lantern bounced away and went out in the snow. She could not light it again.

"Let it go," Placide muttered as she struggled with it.

She had to stop and rest every few minutes.

"The house can not be far away, 'Toinette," he said shakily. "Can't you see it?"

She shook her head. "We'll be able to touch it before we see it."

She had forgotten about the light which now beamed from its window. Placide saw it first. "There it is!" he cried. "We won't stop again till we reach it. There, there! Are you going to fall again, 'Toinette?" he demanded impatiently as she lurched heavily.

She caught herself and swayed crazily for a second. "I'm all right," she said with great weariness. "We'll go on."

They reached the house, felt their way around to the kitchen and stumbled in through the door. They fell heavily, and Placide cursed in agony. 'Toinette was not hurt. She sat up, rubbing her shoulder. Placide forced a smile to his lips. "That's a good girl, 'Toinette. You should have been a man."

The kettle was singing. She made tea, and he drank it greedily. She undressed him then; cut away the boot and trousers from his injured leg. She could feel the broken bones under the blue and swollen skin. She wanted to move him to the bedroom, but he objected.

"We'll be here a long time, 'Toinette. You know how the ice is this time of the year. It will freeze

when this blow is over; but there'll be no travelling on it. It will spread for ten feet right under your eyes. We won't get ashore, and no one will get here much before Christmas. If that's all the wood there is we'll have all we can do to keep just the kitchen warm. And food . . . have you looked for food? There must be flour and some things. Captain Haynes wouldn't take them back to Toledo."

She found flour, coffee, tea and odds and ends of other eatables.

"There's no brandy, is there?" he demanded. She came back to him presently, sniffing a bottle suspiciously. She held it up to his nose. "What's that?" she questioned.

He smelled it inquisitively, and a loud "Humm!" escaped him as he put the bottle to his lips and wet his tongue. "Cognac!" he exclaimed. "Thank God for that!"

In quick succession he drank three great draughts of it. "I don't feel that pain so much now, 'Toinette."

She brought a mattress into the kitchen and made a pallet for him in the corner. When she had moved him to it, and made him as comfortable as possible, there still remained the task of setting the broken leg, an operation about which she knew absolutely nothing. Placide, however, had knowledge of the crude surgery that a man sees and learns in the lumber shanties of the

big woods. He told her what to do, how to pull this way and that, where to press and when to let go. She found she did not have the strength to pull the broken bone back into place. He bade her get a rope and pass it around the door-knob for leverage. He himself then pulled as she pressed. It was awful, sickening. She felt herself growing faint, and she had to step into the adjoining room and away from the fire.

Between them the thing was accomplished at last. All that she could find to serve in lieu of splints were some cane fishing poles, which she hacked off to the wanted length with a meat-cleaver. A sheet served for bandage.

When she had finished he asked for more of the cognac. She gave it to him. He caught her hand and tried to draw it to his lips as she knelt beside him, but she pulled it away. He looked at her sharply. Her head was turned, and he could not read her eyes.

He seemed to ponder something deeply for a moment. "No, 'Toinette?" he asked at last. "You save my life; you do so much for me; but you are angry with me for all that. You don't love me any more, eh?" His tone was tender again. His mouth fell slightly as he saw her slowly shake her head. "Don't say that, little one," he ran on; "there'll be good times yet for us. What's a broken leg? As for the *Heloise* . . . I'll soon have another boat."

Again she said no to him.

She was too overwrought to listen to more of this.

"There can be nothing more for you and me, Placide," she murmured without turning her head. "You never loved me. Grandfather and Amador were right: It was I who loved.

She got up and walked away from him, sobbing softly to herself. "Don't speak of love to me again, I couldn't stand it, Placide." She turned to face him suddenly. "Don't you see that I am to blame for all that has happened? It's all my fault. If I had said no to you; if I had not come, Victor and Jules and Eli would be alive now. I must have been mad."

Placide was up on his elbows in an instant, his face working excitedly. "Your fault?" he cried incredulously. "Am I mad or are you? *Your* fault . . . huh! No more your fault than mine. That damned freighter was to blame. I didn't lose my boat because I didn't know how to sail her. I didn't ask too much of her. As for Jules and Eli . . . that's the sea. Victor was a fool; I thought he was a sailor. But for that floating wreck we'd be snug up the Maumee this very minute, and my leg wouldn't be driving me crazy. How close we came to making it. That would have been something to talk about, wouldn't it? Huh?"

The thought seemed to override all others with him for the moment. Perhaps it was the cognac, or the

excruciating pain he suffered; anyway, he fell to talking to himself . . . sailor-talk, disconcerted, blurred. Presently he fell asleep.

'Toinette watched him for half an hour. Tears relieved her but little. It was cold in the other rooms. She built a bed of old clothes and pillows before the fire. Her undressing was limited to pulling off the boots she had found in the bedroom. She could not close her eyes without addressing her thoughts to God and the Holy Mother . . . to-night of all nights . . . And yet she could not lift her hands in prayer before Placide, fearful lest he awaken and mock even her faith. On tiptoe she stole into the bedroom and sank upon her knees and prayed as even she had never prayed before . . . not for herself, not for Placide, but for those three who would never come to Joe Chevalier again. Later, when the light had been turned out and the blankets drawn up about Placide's shoulders, she turned to her bed and slept.

CHAPTER XVIII.

INTERLUDE.

FROM the lightkeeper's house at Turtle Island one can see the black fringe of Bay Pointe, with its cedars, dwarfed by distance to pygmy trees with trunks no larger than small matches. Beyond, to the north, on clear days, you can get a suggestion of the marshlands which swell away to hills along La Plaisance Bay.

It was a dreary prospect at best, at this time of the year, and yet, whenever it was not snowing, which was seldom enough, it drew 'Toinette to the window, where she would stand for minutes at a time, vainly trying to find some familiar object.

Bitter cold winds were incessantly raking the island. When the house and light blocked their way momentarily, they seemed to back off and hurl themselves onward again, shrieking with redoubled rage. It was a stout house, however, and 'Toinette had a feeling of secure retreat within its walls.

The weather had turned cold, as Placide predicted. The lake was frozen over, but great patches of black water, where the currents played, showed here and there. When it snowed they would crust over with snow-ice

. . . a death-trap for the uninitiated. New patches of water would appear the next morning. Great windrows formed as the shifting ice lifted and fell. Watching it so closely, 'Toinette realized that days must pass before it would be safe for traveling. She remembered the winter, now six years past, when her grandfather had gone through the ice with a horse and cutter. Grandfather Chevalier and René Dusseau had been on their way to Toledo. They had worked for hours trying to save the horse, but the animal had drowned before they could rescue it. Only continued zero weather could overcome the forces at play beneath the icy covering.

Captain Haynes' store of wood had soon been exhausted. It became 'Toinette's daily duty to find fuel for the rapacious stove. An old rowboat had solved the problem temporarily; but that, too, had now gone the way of all firewood. For the past three days they had been burning dead locust, salvaged from the grove at the eastern end of the island. She had made herself a pair of mittens, but the thorns cut through them and stung her hands painfully.

She could not find a sign of the *Heloise*. Placide had urged her to get into the light itself that she might climb to the top for a better view. The door was too well locked, however.

With such economies as she could practice, and they

were many, she made their meager supply of food go a long way. Still, for all her effort, and she toiled patiently, they were seldom warm and usually hungry.

Placide suffered almost continuously, but as time went on he passed from impatience to dumb supplication, lying on the bed she had set up for him in the kitchen and following her about with his eyes. He was completely helpless. Caring for him was a task that did not lighten with the passing days. Luckily her health was unimpaired; but robust as she was, it was all she could do to move him, as was so often necessary. The pain that he suffered alone made it possible for her to do the hundred and one things a nurse does for a bedridden man.

It was largely a new experience for 'Toinette, and she found much of it revolting. The hurt he had given her did not heal. It was too deep, too cruel for that. As a result there were times when she could not drive herself to touch him.

Naturally she tried to adjust herself to the altered aspect of her life, but without much success. Mentally, she still moved in a fog. She saw a change in Placide—his white face, the hollows in his cheeks, the silky beard that covered the once clean shaven jaw—physical changes, that was all. The wild, untameable fire had dimmed in his eyes. Surely that was more than a physical change; but she failed to notice it. It was not the

first time she had made a similar mistake. And yet, if she had given herself into his keeping once without knowing the least about him, it was equally true that she was now as well-informed as she then had been ill-informed. Without her asking he confided in her, giving her little confidences which, though apparently of relative unimportance, enabled her to answer many of her conjectures. If he withheld something—and there were matters about which he could not speak to her—she was not aware of it. Enlightened, as she was now, it naturally frightened her to think of what might have been the outcome of her mad infatuation. She told herself she no longer feared him; and yet she could not have explained why she absented herself from the house, ostensibly looking for firewood, whenever chance presented, to wander through the deep snow or clamber over the rocks, out of sight of the house.

Certainly there was a feeling of escape about these absences, of which she was well aware, but it was largely escape from herself, for she never progressed mentally to the point where she could view her future course. She knew they would leave the island when the ice was safe. In some ways the prospect was not altogether pleasing, for the mainland inevitably suggested her grandfather. She doubted that he would ever forgive her. She would have to go to work. Where she was to find it, she did not know. Still girls did go out to work,

and without plan or preparation. She supposed it would be that way with her. Work was something that seemed to bob up from nowhere.

In a faint way she relished the surprise her return would give, for certainly Victor had been found and her fate likened to his. There was a certain disappointment, too, in being so complacently accepted as dead. Some one might have tried to find them . . . Cleophas for instance; viewing herself as impersonally as she could, he seemed the one least likely to make no effort to find her.

When she was thoroughly fatigued she would stumble homeward reluctantly, her arms half filled with wood. Placide must have wondered. His eyes were always riveted on her before she had the door open. That, in itself, made her dread the moment. It was a questioning glance, more subtle than words. She felt it always, and it gave her a feeling of being hunted, stalked; it stressed the uselessness of trying to resist him.

Anger, violence from him she could have understood and combated; but that silent questioning, that mute probing of the very depths of her was more than she could stand. One afternoon, it was dusk, she came in as usual. They had been on the island for over three weeks at the time. Placide was waiting for her. His eyes picked her up as she stepped into the kitchen. Something snapped in "Toinette. In uncontrolled fury

she whirled on him. "What is it? What do you want?" she fairly screamed. "You lie there waiting for me as if you expected me to run away. I'm not going to leave you. Why do you stare at me like that? What is it you want?"

Placide was unprepared for her outburst. For a second he was speechless. "Why . . . why, nothing, 'Toinette," he said slowly, his voice softer than usual. "I've done nothing, and yet you are so excited."

"Oh, nothing! *Nothing!*" she cried hysterically. "You call it nothing to lie there and watch me from morning till night. It's driving me mad." Her emotional reserve was swept away on the instant. She paced back and forth across the kitchen, unable to check her sobbing, wringing her hands and tearing at her dress.

Placide could not look away. Time after time she screamed at him. Once she even threatened him if he did not quit staring at her. This thing had been welling up in her for days, and she was unable to control it now that she had given it leash.

She went out again eventually. It was long after dark before she stumbled home. She did not glance toward the bed. She lighted the lamp and began preparing supper before she noticed that he was gone. She put her hand to her mouth to stifle her scream. "Placide! Placide!" she cried. She caught up the lamp

and began searching frantically for him. In some way he had managed to drag himself across the floor to the bedroom. A glad little whimper escaped her as she dropped down on her knees beside him. "Oh, oh, Placide you shouldn't have done that, you shouldn't have moved," she said excitedly. "You know I told you, you must not get up."

"That's all right, 'Toinette. My leg doesn't hurt me as much as your crying. I'll stay here; it's a good room. Bring the mattress in here, and you keep the kitchen."

"No, it's too cold in here, Placide. You'll catch cold in your leg as sure as anything. You are going back to the kitchen." She picked him up bodily, and thin as he was he did not weight less than one hundred and seventy pounds, and carried him back to his bed.

He could hear her panting heavily beside him. Later, when she could speak, she said, "You're sure you are all right? Don't ever do that again, Placide."

He nodded and turned his face to the wall. She still sat on the floor beside the bed. She was not crying. He listened intently and caught the irregular pulse of her breathing. The fresh wood which she had put in the stove blazed merrily, making the kitchen really comfortable for the moment. It was still outside, save for the cracking of the ice which boomed loudly.

Minutes passed without his being aware of them; nor

was he at first conscious of the drowsy purring of the kettle. A strange sense of peace descended on him. He put out his hand and rested it lightly on 'Toinette's head. She did not brush it away.

That evening she dug deeply into their remaining supply of food, even melting the last of the sugar to syrup for him to spread over the hot cakes which she baked. Supper over, she washed the dishes. Placide asked her to bring him Captain Haynes' fiddle. One string was missing, but he improvised skillfully, The *complainte* of "*Le Retour Funeste*" dismal and tragic, gave way to the strains of "*Sept Ans Sur Mer*," a sailors' chantey as well known on the shores of Brittany and Poitou as in Canada. Then the gayer "*Le Papillon Suit La Chandelle*," and inevitably the tender "*L'Hirondelle, Messagère De l'Amour*," the song of the swallow, messenger of love who finds the distant sweetheart and returns with his vow of faith.

The old fiddle set the shadows to dancing. The bare room lost its somberness. Eventually it got to be nine o'clock; he had played for over an hour. He sat there, picking the strings aimlessly, wondering what he would play next, and failing to decide, turned questioningly to 'Toinette. He shook his head humbly and a tender smile parted his lips as he beheld her, curled up, sound asleep in her chair beside the fire, her mouth slightly open and snoring ever so faintly.

CHAPTER XIX.

W I N T E R.

OUTSIDE the kitchen door there hung a giant thermometer, the advertising gift of Mockett, the Toledo clothier. Time and weather had rendered Mr. Mockett's sales-talk almost illegible. The instrument was undoubtedly far from accurate; but it had been consulted many times, summer and winter, in the years that it had hung there.

'Toinette always stopped, morning and night, to read it. For the following three days, however, it had no story to tell. The mercury went down into the bowl and stayed there.

The ice no longer boomed. The stillness of great cold settled over island and lake. On the third day the weather tempered off gradually until it rained. Before morning the temperature fell again, leaving the ice clean and hard. There was no longer any excuse for staying on the island. Their talk had all been of getting away, yet now neither willingly broached the subject.

Placide had never been given to introspection, but these past days he had wallowed in a morass of conflict-

ing emotions, hating and pitying himself at the same time. His helplessness seemed to sharpen an otherwise sluggish conscience. For the first time in his life he found himself viewing with growing annoyance those very deeds and conquests which had been his chief vanity.

The women who trooped unbidden out of the shades to sit beside him in silent witness, as he viewed the panorama of his life, sickened him. How easily they had been won; how empty the victory. The very names of some had escaped his memory forever. There had been too many women in his life. A woman had helped him to the *Heloise*. He shuddered as he thought of her, for she could hardly be consigned to the impersonal past.

When he was hating himself the most, pride whispered that he had never taken any of them seriously . . . not even 'Toinette. The thought was a boomerang . . . why hadn't he taken her seriously? It was a question which he could answer . . . and it was nothing so much as that he had always been content to accept passion for love. It had been that way with the others. He had been a pagan in all things.

Well, he had cause to rue it now, watching her doing for him, caring for him as no one else in the world would have cared, denying herself that he might have food to make him strong again. Where was he to find

her like? Who was there to match her in faith, in pride, in simple devotion to all those very things which he had once ridiculed and scorned? Every day she became more desirable and less attainable. He had taken her in lust and lost her forever in love.

He knew that so much better than she did herself, seeing what she failed to see, that these weeks of close intimacy on the island would brand her for all time in the eyes of her people, that those who should be first to defend her would be the very ones to question her. In her innocence she might fail to grasp this, were they to stay on the island indefinitely, but she would know before they had left it twenty-four hours, and the knowledge would burn deeper with every passing day. Only marriage would still the tongue of gossip, satisfy the Church, mollify her grandfather and turn the finger of scorn. It was the great cure-all which nobody questioned. The misery and unhappiness of the enslaved did not matter.

Placide shook his head to himself at that. Fool he might be, but he was not rash enough to believe that 'Toinette would enter into such an arrangement. She had defied her grandfather and the Church for him, and she would as certainly defy them for herself. Public opinion had never singled her out. Until it did she would not admit it could hurt her.

But why tell her, since she did not know? She had

loved him once (how sure he was of it), and great loves never wholly die. Might there not still be a chance for him? She must see that his love for her was now as great as hers had been. There must be some way in which he could atone for the wrong he had done her. In his pocket there was over a hundred dollars. Grandfather Chevalier owed him another hundred and more. It was not much, but more than most families along the Bay had to see them through the winter. 'Toinette was strong; she could work, too. By spring his leg would be mended again and he could set about getting a new boat. He skipped lightly over that part of his plans; it had taken him five years to repay the loan that had made the *Heloise* his.

He gave some thought to what his reception ashore might be. He was judge enough of men to understand that he had lost caste in certain directions, while gaining it in others. But he doubted that his personal safety would be involved, even though Old Joe's enmity, as well as Sam Drouillard's, would pursue him. Many would take their cue from them. But in the end their unfriendliness must melt to at least something approaching the old camaraderie. If not, he could give as well as receive.

'Toinette had been out most of the morning searching for material to build the sled on which it had been agreed she was to pull him over the ice to the bay.

That afternoon, Placide directing and 'Toinette using hammer and saw, the thing was knocked together. It was crude, of course. 'Toinette surveyed the finished product rather proudly from where she sat at the foot of his bed. "It's stout, Placide," she said.

He nodded his head admiringly. "It would seem so," he answered, and raising his eye from the sled to her he added, "Stouter, I fear, than the one who is to draw it. Six miles is a long distance, 'Toinette."

There was frank approval in his eye. All afternoon he had been under her spell, stealing shy glances at her rounded arms and white throat with its hint of swelling bosom and feeling his blood warm as he watched her moving about so lithely.

She seemed unaware of the intentness of his gaze as she ran her fingers through her hair, catching up the little strands that had become loosened. "Grandfather always said it was only five miles to the Light. It doesn't matter. If the wind is not blowing too hard I won't mind."

She started to rise, but Placide held her back. "Don't get up," he pleaded, and his tone was so tender that she winced unconsciously as she glanced at him sharply.

"When are we going to leave?" he asked, more to cover his own emotion than for any other reason. "It

may snow again any day. Perhaps to-morrow morning. . . .”

“Or the following day,” ’Toinette interrupted.

“Why . . . you don’t seem anxious to get away, ’Toinette,” he murmured slowly. “Your grandfather won’t . . .”

“Oh, no, it’s not my grandfather; it’s not myself I am thinking of. It’s you, Placide.”

“So?” he questioned a little breathlessly.

“Yes. What are you going to do? Where are you to go? I know my grandfather will not forgive me. Surely he will not take you in.”

“So you think of me instead of yourself, eh? See! You do care for me, little wren. Oh, don’t draw away.” The warm fragrance of her went to his head. He reached out and put his arm around her. “Why fight me, ’Toinette? You are mine! You know you are mine. I love you. Can’t you see I do?”

He smothered her in his arms and kissed her although she fought frantically to get free of him. At last she pushed him back on the bed and sprang away to stand before him with her face buried in her hands. “How could you do that to me, Placide?” she mumbled brokenly.

He drew in his breath in a despairing gasp. How still it grew then.

“Oh, but I love you. Promise you’ll marry me as

soon as we reach shore. I'm no longer the madman I was. I've changed. Can't you see, 'Toinette. Say you will marry me. Don't tell me you are going back to marry Xavier Drouillard."

She smiled slightly as she shook her head, and he never had seen quite that sort of smile on her lips before, so tender, so wistful. "No," she whispered seconds later. "Xavier wouldn't want me now. I'm not going to marry any one, Placide."

So she knew after all! He could only stare at her helplessly . . . truly hopeless for once in his life. It left him mute. She was preparing their supper before he found courage to speak again. "Cook everything there is left, 'Toinette," he advised. "We'll leave tomorrow. It will give you more strength than if you eat it in the morning."

For the first evening in a week or more he did not ask for the fiddle. The following morning broke clear and cold. They had no preparations to make. 'Toinette brought the sled into the kitchen, helped place him upon it and with hardly a look around pulled him through the door and out into the snow. She had not made a fire, so there was no need of going back into the house.

The snow was almost as hard as ice and she pulled him to the beach without difficulty. Once on the lake the going was even easier. Almost in silence they drew

away from the island. The sun began to shine with dazzling brightness, turning the world about them to queer greens and blinding reds. 'Toinette chose her course by instinct, moving ahead with eyes half closed against the brilliant light, unable to discern either the distant shore or the black speck moving rapidly over the ice toward her.

CHAPTER XX.

H A R V E S T.

'**T**OINETTE did not find it necessary to rest, although Placide urged her to do so, from time to time. She had covered almost half the distance to the mainland when distant shouting stopped her abruptly. Shading her eyes with her hands she saw a man drop the sled he had been dragging and run towards her.

"Who is it?" Placide demanded excitedly, propping himself up on his elbow and endeavoring to answer his own question.

"I can't tell yet," 'Toinette told him. "It must be some one looking for us."

The distance between the runner and them diminished quickly.

"It's Cleophas!" 'Toinette exclaimed a minute later, her voice betraying her gladness at the discovery.

In a few seconds he was up to them, more agitated than 'Toinette had ever seen him.

"So, it's you!" he cried, breathing heavily, his voice husky with emotion and his great bulk trembling visibly, and in his joy and excitement at finding her, ignoring Placide.

'Toinette felt herself going to pieces. "Cleophas!" she gasped pitifully. She could not say more. Good old Cleophas . . . always the friend in need! She could no more withstand the impulse to fling herself into his arms than fly. Like a frightened chick scurrying to the shelter of its mother's wing, she ran to him, felt his arms close about her, and with her head buried against him, let her tears rain unchecked.

Cleophas was as much surprised as Placide. It had needed something like this to arouse him, and so at last, as 'Toinette wept, the mastiff glared at the wolf-hound. Wrath and indignation sat queerly on his kindly face, but Placide was not fooled. If he shook his head it was with something of relinquishment . . . the first chilling admission that Cleophas had gained what he had lost.

Smiling tremulously through her tears, 'Toinette raised her head and spoke to Cleophas. "You thought I was dead, Cleophas?"

"No," he answered, shaking his head wisely. "I've known for weeks—we've all known for that matter—that some one was on the island. We saw the smoke day after day. Soon after Flygette found Victor's body some wreckage from the *Heloise* came ashore. From that we knew she had gone down; but the fire on the island said plainly that all had not been lost. Since

some one was there, I would not admit you had been drowned. Were there just the two of you?"

"Yes. Jules and Eli went down with the vessel. Oh, it was awful, Cleophas. We struck the wreck of the *Dean Richmond*. It was not Placide's fault."

"No?" he grunted non-committally, and for the first time he addressed himself to Placide. "What's the matter with you?"

"I broke my leg," Placide answered indifferently.

"In three places," 'Toinette supplemented. "I don't believe he'll ever walk on it again. We couldn't set it properly."

If she expected Cleophas to express any sympathy, she was mistaken. He pressed her for details of the wreck and their life on the island. "Then you are all right?" he asked when she had finished, and his eyes were on Placide rather than her.

Both understood him perfectly. Placide's lips curled scornfully at his question. The message his eyes tried to deliver to 'Toinette was lost on her as with cheeks flaming she nodded her head. A sigh of relief escaped Cleophas.

"You found that question necessary, eh?" Placide demanded of him with open insolence.

Cleophas stared back without answering at once. "You forget that she was with you," he said then. "My faith in her is as great as my distrust of you. Think

what you will, you did not fool me. Even so, I helped you to her, because she would have it that way. It was I who tripped Amador that night and gave you your chance. My regard for 'Toinette did not depend on her answer. My feeling toward you did, however. If you always had been so solicitous of her good name she would have been spared all this."

Placide held the sharp retort which simmered on his tongue. "You speak the truth," he said finally. "But I promise you that the one who questions her will answer to me some day."

"No, Placide," 'Toinette exclaimed wearily, "make no threats. Hot words will not turn their tongues. But Cleophas, what of my grandfather? What does he say?"

"Oh, I . . . I wouldn't let that matter so much, 'Toinette," he stammered rather awkwardly, sparring for his real answer. "You know how he is given to thundering."

'Toinette would not be put off. "But what does he say? Has he sworn never to forgive me? I must know."

"He thinks you were drowned; he says he hopes you were. When I told him about the smoke on the island he would not listen to my plans for crossing the ice. I've been trying to reach you for a week. Last Sunday I drove over to Pointe Place, thinking to cross from there; but the ice was even worse than it was here."

'Toinette heard him in dry-eyed silence. It was no more than she had feared; and yet the realization brought home to her afresh, and with startling poignancy, the helplessness of her position. The eagerness with which she had looked forward to reaching the bay was gone on the instant. It suddenly became the last place in the world she wanted to see. In her excitement she even considered returning to the island.

When Cleophas had transferred Placide to his sled and urged on them some of the food which he carried, he found her still reluctant to go on. He surmised the reason. "Don't think you are without friends, 'Toinette," he exclaimed encouragingly. "They'll all be glad to see you again. They've missed you, every one of them, even your grandfather. Like as not he'll throw his arms around you when he sees you. If he doesn't, there are many places you can go."

She was not easily convinced; but when her own fears had been somewhat allayed she became equally concerned about what was to become of Placide.

"You worry yourself unnecessarily," Cleophas told her, not without a trace of impatience. "I'll find a place for Captain Labadee."

"Of course," Placide echoed. "What is the matter with Azalma? I guess she would be glad to have me for the money it would bring in. I can pay my way."

The indefiniteness of the arrangement far from satis-

fied 'Toinette, but she consented to it and walked on beside Cleophas. Familiar objects began to appear before long, and in spite of herself she quickened her pace.

"They're racing on the ice to-day," Cleophas informed her a few minutes later. "There are four or five cutters out. See them?"

"Yes, but I can't recognize the drivers; they're too far away. I suppose the Morrin boys and Xavier Drouillard are among them."

Cleophas nodded.

"Dan La Pointe is down, too. They all had their horses in to be shod yesterday. They haven't seen us yet. Some of them will drive over as soon as they do."

In the course of the next few minutes his prophecy was fulfilled, one driver executing a sharp turn and heading directly for them. Cleophas recognized the horse while it was still some distance away. 'Toinette saw him scowl. "Here comes Xavier," he announced. "He'll do well to keep his tongue."

"You see that he does, Cleophas," Placide urged.

'Toinette turned on both of them at that. "I never was afraid of Xavier Drouillard before. What have I done that I should fear him now? I'll answer for myself."

Xavier evidently sensed their hostility as he pulled up his horse. He attempted to brazen it out by ex-

claiming heartily, "Well, well! Alive after all." Somehow the gesture fell short of the desired effect. It was like a boy playing at being a man by wearing his father's hat. Xavier was immediately uncomfortable. His eyes snapped maliciously as he turned his attention from 'Toinette to Placide. "Captain Labadee does not seem to have fared so well," he declared pointedly.

"So it would appear," Placide answered flatly. Even though he was *hors de combat* his tone caused Xavier to address his further remarks to 'Toinette.

"This will be news for your grandfather," said he with evident relish. The smug air with which Xavier made the statement infuriated her.

"I'm surprised that you tarry here, Xavier, when you might be spreading your news," she exclaimed angrily. "I know my grandfather would prefer to hear it from you."

He knew he had reached her, and he laughed to himself. How he would have liked to cow her. What pleasure it would be to humble her as she so richly deserved. Well, maybe that day would come yet. Out of the tail of his eye he saw Placide glaring at him, and it foolishly emboldened him to say. "I presume the Captain will marry you, now that you are back."

"I consider that a matter which does not concern you at all," Placide whipped out, half rising in his anger. "If I could get on my feet I would send you

about your business with the back of my hand." Turning to Cleophas he asked, "Why do we stay here wasting our time on this young busybody?"

"For no reason at all," Cleophas answered sharply. "Move your horse, Xavier."

"I'll move my horse when I am ready to do so. Captain Labadee threatens me, eh? Say, who are you to threaten me? You've lost your boat; you're penniless. And the men who sailed with you . . . I don't see them. You managed to save 'Toinette though, didn't you? The two of you have been living together on the island for weeks! And now you dare . . ."

"Stop!" Cleophas roared, grabbing him by the arm and pulling him half way out of his sleigh. "I warn you, keep your tongue!"

As Xavier tried to break his hold 'Toinette pushed Cleophas back tigerishly and planted herself before the precious fool.

"Punish him, Cleophas!" cried Placide.

"No! He'll answer to me for that," 'Toinette insisted, "the evil-minded young beast. You know we were not *living together*, as you put it. What right have you even to think such a thing?"

"Well, what *am* I to think? We all know why he ran off with you. What right have you to put on airs? A few months from now you'll not be so quick to retort. Time will prove what you were doing on the island.

Before summer comes you'll be begging him to marry you."

The utter cruelty of what he said seemed to paralyze Cleophas temporarily. In the half-second that he stood there stunned, 'Toinette yanked the whip out of the socket and with undreamed of strength cut Xavier's face open. Without knowing what he was doing he pulled on the reins and the frightened horses dashed away.

"Go, you whelp!" Cleophas shouted after him, his voice so charged with rage that it broke in falsetto.

"Come here," Placide murmured to 'Toinette. She did not move, however, but stood dumbly with the whip still clutched in her hand, her face overly white. Cleophas turned to her.

"He deserved worse than that, 'Toinette," said he. "What a whelp he is! Look! He'll not go back to the others with that face. See? He is turning in to shore. He'll sneak home as quickly as he can."

'Toinette opened her fingers and let the whip fall upon the ice. "I can't go on, Cleophas . . . not after that."

"What," he asked incredulously, "you are going to let him accomplish the very thing he set out to do? No, no, 'Toinette!" He shook his head solemnly. "That man hasn't a single friend. Who cares for what Xavier Drouillard thinks or says? He stands alone.

Didn't you say you were not afraid of him. Well, then, let's be done with this foolishness. Mark my word, he'll have enough to do to explain how he came by that cut across his face."

The other drivers, and one or two on foot, were coming toward them in a body. Cleophas picked up his sled-rope and started off. "You couldn't turn back now if you wanted to," he said kindly. "Just be brave, 'Toinette."

Noisy Dave Morrin shouted loudly and cursed harmlessly in surprise at seeing them. In a few minutes they were surrounded by an excited throng hurling questions at them: Where were Jules and Eli? How had the *Heloise* been wrecked? What was the matter with Placide? Why had Xavier turned off so unexpectedly? Their tone was quite different from Xavier's. 'Toinette could not help smiling wanly at the heartiness of her reception, and even Placide was pleasantly surprised.

"Come on," Dave exclaimed, "I'll hitch your sled to my cutter. You get in with me, 'Toinette, I'll drive slowly."

"Did you hear that" chaffed Flygette La Plante. "Dave says he's going to drive slowly!"

A merry chorus met this sally. Fancy Dave Morrin driving slowly!

"Ha, don't you believe him," Dave's brother laughed.

"He spoiled Mrs. Malbay's funeral with his fast driving."

All were conscious of the drama that impended, and when Dave drew up before Grandfather Chevalier's cabin, they gathered about him just outside the door, looking very concerned. Dave paid no attention to them, but yelled out in a voice to wake the dead:

"Hey, you, Joe! Look what I've got here!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A DOOR IS CLOSED.

GRANDFATHER CHEVALIER was not taken by surprise. For the past ten minutes with the aid of his long glass, he had been scanning the little party moving across the ice. Amador had called the old man's attention to their coming, and at first glance, for a fleeting second, his face had relaxed and a cry of thankfulness had rumbled in his throat.

Amador's sigh of relief at this had been short, however, for Grandfather Chevalier's expression had changed on the instant, and in the space of a few seconds he whipped himself into a towering rage, remembering only his hatred of Placide and the shame 'Toinette had brought on him.

Even in his anger he did not doubt but what his affair with Captain Labadee would be settled to his entire satisfaction. But 'Toinette . . . how could he ever undo the wrong she had done him?

It was very real to him. He had watched over 'Toinette like an eagle, allowing no man to cast eyes at her as a woman until Placide Labadee, with his smooth

tongue and devil's grin, had betrayed his friendship, even as his own flesh had betrayed his trust.

In his time, he had been a smuggler. Everyday he dealt in contraband. He often received and disposed of stolen goods. But these were matters of business; a man had to live. Until now no woman of his name had ever shamed him. He groaned bitterly. Did she think to come back to him now? *No!* There was no place for her here. Let her go her way. She had soiled his only priceless possession, and neither tears nor promises should unbar the door to her.

"But you are quick to condemn," Amador cried. "She is alive, and apparently well. Be thankful for that. She is only a child; hear her story before you refuse to forgive."

"I'll hear no story. Go! Stop them! Don't let her come here. She knew what she was doing, child or not, and she'll not come snivelling back to me!"

Because of the crowd at the bay to-day, he was less sober than usual, but there was no trace of indecision in his manner nor loss of dignity in his pose as he raised his long arm and bade Amador be gone.

Amador closed the door behind him as he stepped out. The crowd surged forward.

"Where's Joe?" Dave demanded.

He knew where Joe was well enough. His whole manner proclaimed as much, and the peculiar way in

which his eyebrows arched said that he would have Grandfather Chevalier out now to face them no matter what the cost.

Amador did not answer him at once. His eyes leaped to 'Toinette. He mumbled her name, and his lips trembled as he gazed at her and saw the scars of disillusionment and suffering and misery.

'Toinette's eyes filled, and she took a step toward him, her hands half raised unconsciously as she mutely appealed to him to intercede in her behalf. If any one could sway her grandfather, it was Amador.

But Amador shook his head discouragingly and held her off with the sudden sternness of his eyes. "Wait, 'Toinette," he muttered, and turning to Dave, asked him to get the others away.

"What? He knows we are here and refuses to come out?" Dave demanded, feeling that the crowd expected something of him. "I'll get him out!" he roared.

Amador tried to stop him but he pushed the old man out of the way and flung back the door. He took but one step forward and then recoiled as if on springs, for there, seated in his big chair, and facing the door, his rifle across his knees, sat old Joe, his fierce old eyes flaming through half-closed lids.

Dave was a braggart and something of a bully, but he was not a fool. He changed front immediately.

"Come on, Joe," he begged, careless now of what the others might think. "'Toinette is here; she is all right."

Grandfather Chevalier was not to be conciliated. "This is my house," he thundered, "no one enters here against my will. Go; the pack of you!"

Dave started to speak, but old Joe cut him off before he could utter a word. "Go!" He did not have to lift his rifle. Dave backed out, and the others moved away with him.

Cleophas glanced at Amador.

"You stay," Amador muttered, "and you, 'Toinette." He caught her by the hand and pulled her toward the door. "Speak to him yourself," he ordered.

Amador's defiance came as a thunderbolt. Grandfather Chevalier's face went white, and as 'Toinette stepped forward he attempted to throw up his arm and cover his eyes that he might not be compelled to gaze on her. But he was too late; 'Toinette was there, facing him, and he could not look away, she had changed so. He searched in vain for some sign of the tomboy she had been. Some subtle change had taken place in her. She was thinner than ever he had seen her, and she carried herself differently. No trace of her childish awkwardness remained. Even now, as she held her hands out to him in supplication, there was a strange grace and unlooked for dignity in her pose. And slowly, as he continued to stare at her, he came to realize

that 'Toinette was a woman, and old memories laid violent hands on him and plucked at his heart.

He tried to read in her face the story of what she had done these weeks she had been away. There was no sign of guilt on it; no trace of wrong-doing. And yet, he had only to remember the man with whom she had fled to know that his eyes deceived him; Placide Labadee was not one to be cheated of his game once he had it in hand. Find the man or woman guileless enough to believe in a girl's innocence after such an affair as this!

By such means did he fan his faltering pride and recalcitrant stubbornness into flame as 'Toinette stood before him, overwhelmed by all the pleasant little memories which this familiar spot evoked. It was home; and as her eyes leaped about the low-ceilinged room, a sob shook her.

Fear seized old Joe—fear such as he had never known; fear that, despite all his vows and thundering, he would be unable to send her away. He got out of his chair and stood before her with his clenched fist outstretched. "Go!" he screamed, "there is no place for you here. And if you don't know where to turn, ask those whose advice you were so willing to take when you left. Don't ever put your foot in this house again!"

He was terrible in his wrath. Placide turned away with eyes flashing.

"Have a care!" Cleophas exclaimed hotly as he

planted himself squarely before Grandfather Chevalier. "You go too far. She has done no wrong, I tell you."

"You tell me, eh?" old Joe mocked him. "And I tell you they have been living together for weeks on the Island."

"Not the way in which you infer," Cleophas shot back. "You are letting your temper sweep away all the judgment you ever had."

They glared at each other for long seconds.

"So you turn on me, too?" Grandfather Chevalier snarled with fine contempt. "And yet I once believed you wanted her yourself. I thought to find you on my side in this, but you tell me she has done nothing wrong. You would have had her go then, eh?"

"No! But she would go . . . and since it was her wish, I helped her to go."

"Well, you did her a great service," the old man laughed evilly. "What have you made of her? Who would marry her now?"

Cleophas forgot to be embarrassed for once.

"I will marry her, if she will have me," he answered without hesitation.

Grandfather Chevalier tried to cow him with his eyes, but failed completely. His rage mounted again until his lips were flecked with foam. "What a fit mate you'd be for her, you lumbering lout," he shrilled. "Again I say to the pack of you—go! And now!"

He half raised his rifle as he lurched forward. The others fell back a step, but 'Toinette did not move. Indeed she could not have moved, so rooted to the spot was she. As in a dream she heard Cleophas defy her grandfather; but what he said impinged itself only vaguely on her consciousness. She had been ordered to go. That was real. The thing she had feared had come to pass sooner than she expected. How foolish they were to argue with her grandfather. Did they not know he never changed his mind? A hundred times, and ten times a hundred times, had she seen a word of remonstrance whip his lukewarm antagonism to an idea into unalterable resistance.

Assuredly there was nothing to be gained by waiting. He had said she must go, and that was an end to it. She even tried to take a step toward the door, but even as she lifted her foot to take that first step realization of what life was about to do to her came in a blinding flash, clear and pitiless.

Where was she to go?

Truly there was no place open to her. If her own grandfather would not have her was it likely Cleophas' father would take her in? It was well enough to admit the futility of trying to sway Grandfather Chevalier; but this was her home, the only home she had ever known. Every nook and cranny of this sturdy cabin held childhood memories and tender associations, and

like the woodland fern which thrives on a handful of soil in some rocky crevass, entwining its roots about and drawing its life's blood from seemingly barren flint and granite, only to wither and die in more promising place if transplanted, so she had lived and been happy in Grandfather Chevalier's cabin, and like the fern, it seemed to her, she too must wither and die were she to cross that threshold never to return.

She had wronged him, shamed him, perhaps, but surely he could not ask this of her . . . that she be ordered away from his door. She caught Placide's eyes on her. He was homeless, too; but he had money; he would find a way out. She stood alone, penniless as well as homeless.

Dimly her untutored mind realized that she alone would have to pay for this folly. Perhaps it was because she was so innocent, so pure of heart, so guileless, that the bitterness of this moment seemed almost more than she could bear. Life was suddenly ugly and mean. Her faith in the Church, heretofore so sublime, failed to sustain her now, and stranger still, prayer, whose efficacy she had never questioned, seemed in this crisis but a frail staff on which to lean.

She looked around at all of them, and her eyes came to rest on Cleophas, again the rock in the storm. She even asked herself if she loved him, and the answer was no. She wondered if she could ever love again.

Love had been crucified—the first love of her life. How empty the word was now, and how rich had been its promise just a short while ago.

Grandfather Chevalier's eyes did not lose their glitter as he continued to stare at her, but he did drop back a step, and it was fear again, fear that he might be soft when every fiber of him—every tradition—bade him be stern. And to save himself he raised his hand again and pointed to the door.

'Toinette clasped her hands to her breast as she swayed crazily before him. "No, grandfather," she beseeched him, sinking to her knees, "don't send me away! I disobeyed you, but I have done no wrong; not what you think. Oh, forgive me for hurting you. But don't send me away; you need me as much as I need you. See, the cabin is not like it was when I was here; the dishes are not washed; the windows are dirty. And Honorine, who takes care of her?" She smiled through her tears at him as her voice quavered. "You, grandfather, you often said there was no one could cook like 'Toinette. Let me stay and care for you. No matter how it storms this winter, I'll go to Vienna any time. And when spring comes, who is to plant the potatoes if I am not here? Don't send me away, let me stay . . . please, please . . . and I'll work like I never did before. I won't disobey you again." A sob choked her and she did not go on for a moment. "I thought I loved

Placide; that was my mistake. But I have done no wrong, have I, Placide?"

Grandfather Chevalier shook his head mercilessly.

"So you appeal to him to bear you out, eh?" he taunted. "I trusted him and called him friend, and he repaid me with this, yet you appeal to him. No, no! I tell you to go; go before I throw you out!"

In his madness he seized her and pushed her back. Amador got in front of her and struck his hand down.

"So you really want her to go, eh?" he demanded, as beside himself as Grandfather Chevalier. "Have it your way, then! I did everything I could to prevent her going with Placide, even to putting a bullet through his shoulder; but she thought she loved him, and she went in spite of us. Now she's back, and if there's been any wrong done you can blame yourself. You dared him to take her; and he did. I see now that it wasn't Toinette you were thinking of, half as much as yourself. Don't think to fool any one by saying you were deceived, for if ever a man gave warning of his intention, Placide warned you. But you wouldn't believe the man lived rash enough to defy you. You know differently now. As for 'Toinette . . . she still is one of us; and since you will not take her in, I will!"

The effect of this was to leave Grandfather Chevalier speechless. It was so unexpected, so unlooked for in Amador. Even 'Toinette glanced from the old man to

Placide in dumb amazement. Cleophas nodded his head approvingly; he alone seemed master of himself.

"Come!" Amador exclaimed with a wave of his hand, indicating the sled-rope. 'Toinette stared helplessly at him. "Come!" he repeated, catching her by the arm.

'Toinette threw out her hands in a last despairing gesture to her grandfather. Grandfather Chevalier's eyes narrowed to mere slits, and tossing up his head he turned his back on her.

Dumbly she reached out for Amador then, and stumbled away on his arm. She seemed about to fall. Cleophas held out his hands to help her, but she went on, unseeing. Catching up the sled-rope he followed after them, dragging Placide.

It needed a painter to catch the spirit and moving somberness of that scene . . . the little procession tramping across the snow, coldly pink now as the December sun burned feebly through the leaden cloud-bank, the black cedars, the bundled figure on the sled, and in the doorway of the long, low cabin the squat figure of an unkempt old man fingering a rifle.

From a distance, Dave and the others saw, but said no word, and when at last Grandfather Chevalier kicked the door to, they turned away to mutter among themselves.

Darkness fell early, but old Joe did not strike a light. The glow from the fireplace dimly illumined the cabin

and revealed him, now comfortably drunk, as he paced the length of the room, talking to himself, his face working strangely and his old eyes flashing with baffled rage. Amador's defection had caused his cup of bitterness to overflow. They were all against him. He could see it now. He brooded on in this vein for an hour. In some way Placide would pay for what he had done, and so would Amador. As for 'Toinette—he might have forgiven her eventually, had she been contrite enough, but never, now!

Long after dark he got out his cutter and headed for town, taking the winter-road up the frozen creek as far as Flygette La Plante's, where the main road passed. He had one ally left, at least. That was Sam Drouillard. If Sam refused to give the usual credit against next year's skins and hides, maybe Amador would find he had too many mouths to feed, and when Placide and 'Toinette were shown the door, who on the bay would dare to take them in?

CHAPTER XII.

"THE ROCK IN THE STORM."

IN the summer, when the people on the bay used the road which ran past Amador's cabin, visitors were plentiful and seldom a day passed that some chance passer-by did not stop at the little shanty on Muddy Creek for a friendly word. Winter added to its remoteness, once the ice was fit for traveling, and often, for days at a time, no one passed. When by chance some one did drop in they were seized upon eagerly and their news devoured, and they were not suffered to go until they had been divested of even the stalest gossip.

If neighbors dropped in more frequently or some of the dwellers along the bay chose the longer road past Amador's now, it was only because of the presence of 'Toinette and Placide, for the curious are everywhere.

Strangely enough they never left without a whispered word with either Amador or his brother Antoine. 'Toinette soon sensed that she was the subject of those last-minute mutterings. Even Azalma, whose friendship she had always treasured, smiled at her and sur-

reptitiously sought to find some evidence of change in her which would undeniably prove that she was soon to pay for her escapade with Placide.

Delphine Roubideaux suggested that she go to Toledo. 'Toinette demanded to know why she should go to Toledo; she had nothing to hide. Delphine stammered and said she didn't mean that; but she did not come again.

It got so that it pleased 'Toinette to be rude and caustic with those who came, in one guise or another, to satisfy their curiosity and carry away food for gossip, knowing the fact that they had actually seen 'Toinette, with their own eyes, as they put it, would give their fiction authenticity of a sort with many.

Eugene Malbay was an exception. He alone was 'Toinette glad to see. He came often, bringing his verses, or to read some book which he had come by miraculously.

Placide was still unable to walk. He and Eugene got on well together, talking for hours.

'Toinette saw nothing of her grandfather. Amador had seen him in town, but they had not spoken. Nor did Cleophas appear, and as days passed without bringing him, his absence began to pique her. She wondered if pressure was being exerted at home to keep him away. She dismissed the thought immediately, for in a way it implied that he had turned against her. Child though

she was, she knew his faith in her was his life. Was he offended, then?

’Toinette was frank enough with herself to admit that he well might be. Indeed, on looking back, it seemed she had always managed to hurt him.

Other matters called, and she tried to forget Cleophas. Of a surety there was much to be done, what with the cooking and looking after the cabin. Amador and Antoine submitted with docility to her petty tyrannies, although they could see no sense in the endless house-cleaning and scrubbing of pots and pans.

Eugene came again on Saturday evening. ’Toinette knew he and Cleophas were the best of friends. As he was leaving she spoke to him about Cleophas.

“Is it because people are talking about me that he stays away?” she asked.

“You should know better than that, ’Toinette,” Eugene chided her.

“Then he is not offended?”

“Certainly not. And if he were, that would not keep him away if he thought you would like to see him here.” Eugene spread his hands deprecatingly. “It’s plain enough that even you fail to understand him. I tell you he is as sensitive as a girl. If he stays away it is only because he fears his presence here would embarrass you. . . . There is Placide, you know.”

’Toinette bit her lip at this perfectly obvious fact.

"Forgive me, Eugene," she murmured. "But there is no reason why he should not come. Tell him I want to see him."

In some manner Eugene managed to send word to him that night, and as a result Cleophas came early Sunday morning behind his pair of high-stepping grays. He was dressed in his Sunday best.

"I came early. I thought maybe you would like to go to mass, 'Toinette," he exclaimed, doing his best to appear casual as he shook the hands of all.

'Toinette blushed and appeared to be unable to decide whether she should like it or not.

"Go," Amador urged, "it will do you good. The road is in fine shape. You've been sewing now for a week. Let us see what you have accomplished."

"Why shouldn't you go?" Placide demanded, as 'Toinette glanced at him.

"You should well enough know why," she murmured frankly. "They've all been talking about me."

"I should not let their talk disturb me," Cleophas said with deep conviction. "You'll do more to stop their tongues by seeming not to care."

"That's good sense," Amador declared. "Go; you have little enough time. You don't want to sulk here until the *Curé* comes to chastise you."

'Toinette had been secretly dreading Father Braire's monthly visit. He was as punctual about his pastoral

visits as the stars in their courses, and neither wind nor storm could stay him.

"All right," she exclaimed, "I shall go, and let them make the most of it. It will not take me long, Cleophas."

She was ready, presently, and pretty in her new dress. Excitement had colored her cheeks and she was more like her old self than they had seen her in weeks.

"You do well," Amador exclaimed as he backed off to behold her. "I tell you, I've never seen anything prettier on the bay."

Amador had bought the goods for her—no trifling sum for him. Moved by a sudden impulse 'Toinette threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. "I'm proud of it, too, Amador," she cried.

"But go now," he urged, "or Cleophas will have his team in a lather by the time you strike town."

He came out to see them off. He stood looking after them as they drove away.

"Joe should see her to-day, the stubborn old fool!" he muttered savagely, and turning to the wood-pile, swung his ax furiously for half an hour.

Placide had watched them go, too. He had hobbled to the window and watched them until they were out of sight. Although he had urged her to go with Cleophas, he sensed that it meant the breaking of the last slender thread that bound her to him. For weeks he had known

that she no longer loved him. Day after day he had realized the truth more and more, even though he had never ceased trying to win back the affection and devotion that once had been his.

At times he took a savage delight in torturing himself by reviewing his mad betrayal of the one being in the world who mattered to him now. He called himself a fool and worse than a fool. Mentally he slew himself a thousand times for his folly. Worst of all, he could find no excuse for himself. He had been warned on every hand. Even Eli, staunchest of friends who had followed him blindly for years, had demurred in this affair and tried his best to stay him.

He remembered how freely Eli had sacrificed his life to save her. Even there had he cheated himself, for there seemed little likelihood now that a similar sacrifice on his part could ever be of the slightest service to 'Toinette.

Placide's ego had suffered severely in the days he had been at Amador's. His inactivity ached him. He hated his impotence and the way the world had of getting on without him. He had no plans for the immediate future, other than that he was not going back to Canada, not until he knew what was to become of 'Toinette, at least.

For a week he had been counting the days that must elapse before he could walk again. 'Toinette had cau-

tioned him to wait, but in his present fit of bitterness he determined to risk it now, and pulling himself erect, he lurched across the floor, his face contorted with pain. He caught hold of a chair and leaning on it managed to get back to his bed.

Amador came in as he let himself down.

"So, you walk, eh?" Amador queried as he studied Placide shrewdly and saw the perspiration break on his forehead. He surmised that 'Toinette's going off with Cleophas was responsible for the effort.

"I couldn't stand waiting any longer," Placide ground out wearily. "It took my breath—but I walked! Don't tell 'Toinette. I hope Eugene is able to borrow the crutches he spoke of. I'll be ready for them in a day or two."

They smoked for a while without speaking. Both were thinking of Cleophas.

"I'd like to see Sam Drouillard's face when 'Toinette walks up the aisle with Cleophas," Amador mused aloud finally. "He'll be lucky if he doesn't have a stroke."

"It was fine, his taking her that way," Placide murmured as he stared into the fire. "Cleophas is no fool; I fancy he knows what he is bringing down on himself and is willing to let them do their worst."

Amador removed his pipe from his mouth and nodded sagely. "Old Etienne, his father, won't like it, and it may cost him some business at the forge. It is too bad."

"It is, but I tell you, Amador, Cleophas may marry 'Toinette yet."

Amador pondered over the thought for a minute or two. "Yes," he said with an air of great wisdom, "he will if they keep up their talking. They'll drive her into marrying him."

Placide glanced at him a little incredulously, for his tone was disapproving.

"It might be the best thing that could happen to 'Toinette," said he moodily.

"No, no! You don't seem to understand, Captain," Amador got up and knocked the dead ashes from his pipe. "Cleophas is a fine lad, but 'Toinette will never be happy with him if she marries him now. Do you think marrying him would stop these wagging tongues? It's well enough to say pay no attention to them, but how is a girl to face them? If there is a mark on 'Toinette, you put it there, and no one but you can ever erase it. If she is to marry, you are the man she ought to wed."

This was the first time Amador had declared himself. He made no effort to soften the rebuke which his words carried.

"And that she'll never do," Placide exclaimed. "Even if she were to marry me do you think that would make everything right?"

"It would make things right as far as other people

are concerned. Over night they'd change their tune. This affair would be referred to then as a romantic lark. Maybe both of you would be unhappy for a while; but again, maybe you wouldn't. If 'Toinette marries any one but you, she'll never see a happy day."

Placide shook his head to himself as he stared unseeingly off into space. Was life really that stupid? He knew there was truth in what Amador said. But he had hurt 'Toinette too deeply already, and he loved her too well to have the further indignity of being forced to marry him visited upon her. Their lives were not indissolubly linked together because of anything that had been. Why did life have to persecute her, when he alone was to blame? If a prejudiced, hypocritical world had to have a sacrifice because they had stepped on the toes of its precious code, why did it not vent its spleen on him?

But then, Placide was more unsophisticated than he supposed. He had but to review his own past to see that life had never asked him to account for his transgressions, and they had been many.

Amador did not address Placide again, and he, for his part, was quite content to occupy himself with his own thoughts.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CURÉ SPEAKS.

SOON after leaving Muddy Creek a great silence fell on 'Toinette and Cleophas. Cleophas' team seemed to need a great deal of attention, and 'Toinette, who had been so anxious to see him, found nothing to say.

When they did speak it was about the weather, the condition of the roads or the health of some chronic invalid. Never, by chance, did they put into words those more personal thoughts which occupied the minds of both.

And yet they found a peculiar happiness in being together again. Once, when they were almost within sight of town, 'Toinette's hand accidentally touched Cleophas'. She felt him tremble beneath her touch. It warmed her and emboldened her to a degree of frankness.

"Does your father know you are taking me to mass, Cleophas?"

"No," he answered with a shake of his head.

"He may not like it."

"He must please himself about that. If it displeases him, I am sorry. I have been a dutiful son."

"Every one knows that. But maybe it would be better if I went into church alone."

"You'll go with me!" Cleophas declared emphatically, his eyes flashing fire. "And proud I'll be to have them see me with you. I tell you, 'Toinette, you distress yourself unnecessarily over what some one may think about you. You have nothing to fear; you are better than the best of them."

"It's nice of you, Cleophas, to say that. But how can I forget that they are talking about me, accusing me of all sorts of things. What is it they say? Do they call me a bad woman?"

"Not to me they don't, you may be sure," he said fiercely. "God help the one who does."

"You see, you mind too, don't you, Cleophas. And yet you tell me to pay no attention to them. What is it they say?"

"Oh nothing . . . nothing," he muttered, absolutely miserable at having been trapped so easily.

"If you will not tell me, who am I to ask?" 'Toinette beseeched him. "You must tell me."

"Well, they say Placide would marry you if you were as innocent as you claim to be," he replied grudgingly.

'Toinette threw up her head angrily. "I suppose that would prove my innocence," she exclaimed with fine sarcasm. "How I hate them. What do they care for me, for my happiness? Nothing! I promise you I

shall never marry Placide Labadee. How could I, Cleophas? I don't love him. Even Amador suggested that I marry Placide; that it would be the best thing for me. They're breaking my heart; I can't stand it, Cleophas." She threw her arms about him and made him look at her. "Why do they keep on hurting me?" she cried piteously. "Why can't they let me be? Must I go away?"

"What, and prove them right? Never! You stay. We'll fight this out together."

She was crying softly. Cleophas put his arm about her and comforted her tremblingly.

"We are in town now," he cautioned. "Don't let them see tears in your eyes, 'Toinette."

They were the last to arrive and so their entrance passed unnoticed, but no sooner were they inside the church than a stifling stillness descended. It was so noticeable that Father Braire paused to turn inquiringly. His shaggy eyebrows lifted grotesquely as he recognized the cause of the interruption, and his look of annoyance changed to one of complete surprise.

Slowly the priest in him overcame the man and he nodded benignly and turned back to his altar. To a person, the congregation seemed to have been watching him for their cue, and they drew in their breath sharply as they lowered their eyes and the mass continued.

'Toinette was a little breathless, and she leaned

heavily on Cleophas as he escorted her to the family pew. Cleophas' father was its only occupant. He glanced up incredulously as he saw his son kneel and stand back for 'Toinette to enter. She managed a feeble smile of recognition, fearing the scowl which she expected would follow. Old Etienne had eyes only for his son, however, and all through mass he continued to stare at him furtively, too bewildered for prayer.

After the first few minutes, 'Toinette's nervousness passed and her beads slipped noiselessly through her fingers as she said her Hail Marys and Our Fathers. Through it all she felt some one scrutinizing her contemptuously, and at the Offertory she stole a glance at the pew opposite and encountered the malevolent eyes of Sam Drouillard.

His face was an apoplectic red. 'Toinette found herself enjoying his rage immensely. If there was one person in the world who had ever failed to instill fear in her it was Sam Drouillard, and she grinned at him deliberately.

M. Drouillard ground his teeth and his bristling hair seemed to stand even more erect as he fought to contain himself. Xavier was with him and he flashed a withering glance at 'Toinette before he turned to calm his father. When he had his parent in hand he glanced across the aisle at 'Toinette again, but this time he en-

countered Cleophas' stone-like stare, and he promptly turned back to his father.

When the mass was over the Drouillards bustled out at once. 'Toinette did not doubt but what they were making their way to the rectory to discuss her presence there with the *Curé*.

"Father Braire will want to see you," Cleophas whispered. "We will not hurry out."

This was not unexpected. It was Father Braire's custom, summer and winter, to bid good-by to his parishoners from the steps of the church. Times without number had he pinched 'Toinette's cheeks and called her a good girl as she passed out with the others. She wondered what word he would have for her to-day.

This moment after church was something to be looked forward to all week long. There, one heard the news of the parish, and when the *Curé's* back was turned, the gossip, too. Young lovers tarried and stole shy glances at each other, thinking their elders none the wiser.

If by chance any one had a new gown or hat, it was certain to be seen there, weather permitting. For this brief quarter of an hour the young men preened themselves and took on airs, until some one like Dave Morrin appeared to shame them with his patent leather shoes and gorgeous weskets.

They were all hearty, well scrubbed; the women

strong and sturdy. After the first greetings, the men drew off to one side to discuss the condition of the roads, the price of skins, the prospects for the crops and all of those kindred matters which affected the husbandry of the countryside; while their good wives discoursed at great length and noisily too, on such standard subjects as Mrs. Gagnier's rheumatism, the high price of sugar, Father Braire's annual visit to Detroit and other matters of like weight.

To-day, however, the little groups were silent and men and women, young and old, stood about expectantly, unmindful of the snow which was falling again and giving sign of being the forerunner of a real storm. The *Curé* came out presently, a heavy cape thrown over his shoulders but with his head bare. His rubicund countenance wore its usual paternal smile, and consciously or not, he seemed to strive to appear casual.

He passed from one to another with a smile and word of greeting, casting his eyes heavenward repeatedly. "I'll not keep you long to-day," he said so all might hear. "The storm we have been expecting is here. I trust you will reach home before it settles down in earnest."

This hint and warning, for it was both, fell on deaf ears, only one or two couples moving away toward the long sheds where the teams were tied.

'Toinette and Cleophas came out then, and imme-

diately fifty pairs of eyes were fastened on them. The *Curé* spread his arms wide and advanced toward 'Toinette. The crowd gasped. It was not this that they had waited for.

"So my little bird has come back to me, eh?" Father Braire queried as he put a fatherly arm about her and patted her shoulder. "It is well for you that you came to-day, for it was in my mind to go to Muddy Creek to-morrow."

'Toinette could hardly contain herself. Was it this friendly home-coming that she had feared? Was there no word of reproach?

"Too bad I have not more young men like Cleophas to find the backsliders and bring them to me. You must have a lot to tell me, Antoinette. Come to my house; I'll not keep you standing here in the snow. I am sure Cleophas will wait."

Thus did he cheat the crowd; but he had done it so nicely that even 'Toinette wondered if it were intentional.

Once seated in his parlor, Father Braire's manner changed. 'Toinette looked around fearfully, half expecting to find Xavier and his father there.

"Now that we are alone I may speak frankly," the *Curé* began very sternly. "You saw how they waited just now, hoping I might throw them a morsel of gossip. There's been too much gossip already. It leads

to bitterness and hatred, and the sooner an end is put to it the better I shall like it. I am glad to see you, my child, but not so glad as I pretended. You have hurt me grievously. You saw for yourself how you have undone my work. Ah, but don't cry; I am not going to scold you. I am very fond of you, Antoinette. I have always been your friend, and I want only to advise you now. Why haven't you been to confession?"

"I was afraid to come." 'Toinette wrung her hands nervously and stared at the floor.

"Afraid? Afraid to come to me? That does not encourage me, little one. Why should you be afraid if you have done nothing to offend our Heavenly Father?"

"I—I don't know," she gasped. "I was just afraid. Every one talks about me and says such awful things."

"And why shouldn't they? You have upset us all. It was wrong of you to defy your grandfather, to run off as you did. You deceived me, too. As I recall it I spoke to you that very day and wondered why you were so evasive. Is this how you think to repay me for my care of you?"

"But I loved him so, Father," 'Toinette murmured with lips quivering. "I couldn't marry Xavier Drouillard."

"Well, I did not insist on your marrying Xavier. But were you so ignorant of life as not to suspect

the honorableness of a love that swore one to such secrecy?"

"But he promised to marry me," she fought back bravely.

"So?" Father Braire paused ominously. "Well," he continued then, with great finality, "it is not too late for him to keep that promise."

"But I no longer love him, Father," 'Toinette cried, her tears getting the better of her.

"See, you make my point for me," he exclaimed. "Just a few short weeks ago you were willing to trust yourself to him, so sure were you of your heart, and now you tell me you have changed your mind. Don't you see of what flimsy stuff a young girl's heart is made? What has made you change your mind so quickly?" He paused and lowered his voice. "Is it because of something that happened while you were together on the island?"

"No," 'Toinette whispered miserably.

"You swear it? Do I understand that you have broken no precept of our Holy Mother Church?"

"Father, I swear it!" she cried a little wildly. "I am a good girl; I have done nothing wrong."

The *Curé* nodded to himself, plainly relieved. "I am overjoyed to hear you say so," he declared. "I know you would not lie to me, your father-confessor, either in the confessional or out of it. But don't ex-

cuse yourself so readily, my child. You have done much that was wrong. Out of this rashness of yours has come enmity, bitterness; men have lost their lives; angry passions have been blown to flame; and see how miserable you are! You have much to make amends for. Ask our Holy Mother to forgive you. You must come to confession, and be unremitting in your prayers. I understand that gossip has it that Captain Labadee has refused to marry you . . . Is that true, my child?"

"He has *begged* me to marry him," 'Toinette declared indignantly. "It is *I* who have refused. He never loved me, or else he would have died before shaming me as he has."

"It is the only way in which he can undo the harm he has done you. I am glad to hear he realizes it. It speaks well for him. Let nothing keep you from marrying him, Antoinette! Your good name will be restored; there will be an end to gossiping and scandal-mongering. And I promise you, if you will overcome your prejudice, and do as I bid, that it will go a long way toward winning you that Heavenly forgiveness without which you can not be truly happy."

'Toinette winced. So this was his solution, too! Were they all mad? Blindly she groped for the back of her chair and drew herself to her feet. Her head throbbed crazily. What were they trying to do to her? Was there no way out of this trap? Would

they bend her to their will? No! Better death than that. If she had to sell herself to buy their good opinion, then let them regard her as they pleased! New courage came to her and she shook her head defiantly like a wild thing at bay.

"No, Father," she implored, "I can't marry Captain Labadee."

"But I say you must," he answered sharply. "I demand it in the name of the Church! Don't think I am severe, for I am not unmindful of your happiness. Indeed, it is that which is my chief concern, and I tell you again there is no other course left open to you. You have never defied me before, and I do not expect you to defy me in this. I shall see Captain Labadee before the week is past, and your grandfather, too, and discuss the matter with them."

He arose and took Toinette's hand in his.

"Don't let this upset you," he said conciliatingly. "Prayer will convince you of the wisdom of what I suggest. If between us we can win the Captain back to the Church, I am sure our Saviour in His divine compassion will reward you with such happiness as you do not dream of. Cleophas is getting nervous, I see," he finished. "Go, now, and take my blessing with you."

"But I shall never marry Captain Labadee, Father,"

she exclaimed stubbornly. Her courage amazed her and her hand trembled as she crossed herself.

The *Curé* only smiled.

"We shall see, my child," he murmured, "we shall see."

CHAPTER XXIV.

T H E R E I S A W A Y .

THE storm raged for the better part of the week, and it was not until the day after Christmas that Father Braire came to Muddy Creek to talk with Placide. He arrived by way of the bay instead of coming direct from town, and by that 'Toinette knew he had been to see her grandfather.

The *Curé's* face was longer than usual. Indeed all of the iron in him seemed to have come to the surface. 'Toinette surmised that his interview with Grandfather Chevalier was at the bottom of it.

Her own face fell as she realized that she was about to pay for the reprieve she had allowed herself in keeping back from Placide any word of what Father Braire had advised. Even then she did not see how she could have broached the matter to him.

Placide glanced sharply at her as he recognized their visitor. The two of them had been alone since noon, Amador having gone to town for flour and Antoine to run his trap-line.

"Why does the *Curé* come here?" Placide asked.

It was too late to tell him now.

"He always comes," she answered evasively.

He smiled so grimly that she wondered if he understood what impended. Placide had been hobbling about on crutches for a day or two and he thumped his way to the door and opened it as Father Braire got out of his old *burleau*.

"I'm glad to see you, Captain," he exclaimed. "On crutches already, eh?"

Placide nodded calmly. "I daresay you recognize them."

Father Braire's face relaxed a little, for, in truth, he did recognize them. In their time they had seen service from one end of the bay to the other. "And how are you, Antoinette?" he enquired as he placed his hat on a vacant chair.

"Very well, Father," she replied softly, patently ill at ease.

"Well, I daresay you haven't been out of the house since Sunday. The air is bracing out. Get your coat and take a turn down the creek. I want to speak to the Captain."

Toinette was glad enough to escape. She caught up her coat eagerly and was gone without another word. The wind was cutting, but she swung along at a sharp pace and was soon warm. Before long she was out of sight of the cabin. Without having any definite destination, she went on and on, and in the

course of an hour or more, came to the bay. The wind had piled the snow up in great drifts. Where the ice had been scoured clean, the footing was slippery. But she went on, and presently she caught her first glimpse of Grandfather Chevalier's cabin.

She felt strangely relieved. She had been unconsciously guiding herself toward it for an hour. It looked comfortable and sturdy against the winter whiteness. Smoke was rising from the chimney. The wind caught it immediately and whipped it away in flat streaks. By watching the smoke she knew she would soon be able to determine if her grandfather were home, for if he replenished the fire the fact would be written in the sky.

She left the ice presently, where she could not help but be seen, were he to glance in her direction, and moved in among the cedars. The snow was deep even there, and she went forward slowly. At last she was within two hundred yards of the cabin. The smoke had not varied.

When another half an hour had passed without any sign of her grandfather's presence, she resolved to go boldly up to the door and try it. In the old days it had never been locked. If it were open to-day, she would steal inside, if only for a minute.

'Toinette did not stop to ask herself what good could come of it. She only knew that it was home

and that it drew her on as though it had arms. She was moving forward when the door opened without warning. Dodging behind a tree, she waited with knees shaking.

Grandfather Chevalier came out and walked to the barn without ever a glance about.

"He's going to town," 'Toinette whispered aloud. "He was letting the fire burn low purposely."

When he had driven away, 'Toinette approached the cabin. She could not go in at once, so strong was her emotion at being home again. Even from a distance her grandfather had looked old and haggard, his face more hawk-like than ever.

The cabin was in terrible disorder. Empty bottles littered the table. Remnants of food were everywhere. The fireplace had not been swept in days. In the kitchen everything was topsyturvy.

'Toinette could only shake her head pityingly as she recalled how neatly she had kept it. She went to her own room and stood at the door with dry throat. It was a minute before she could enter.

The disorder without had not communicated itself to her little chamber. Here everything was as she had left it. She was so overcome that she dropped to her knees and prayed. And it was the first time since she had come ashore that she had lost herself completely in prayer.

Her eyes were wet when she arose, but a smile wreathed her lips. Surely Grandfather Chevalier must think to have her back some day, or he would not suffer this room to remain as it was.

She threw off her coat, and like one possessed, set about putting the place in order. She heated water and washed the dishes; put biscuits to bake; cut down a pair of frozen rabbits from a hook outside the door and put them in a kettle with potatoes and drop-dumpplings. Over the gravy alone she spent fully a quarter of an hour.

That attended to, she cleaned the place thoroughly; got out the ashes and bottles; brought fresh wood from the shed and even paused to put down clean straw for old Honorine.

It was dusk when she finished. The pleasant aroma of home had come back to the cabin. She was almost tempted to light a lamp. It was the one touch needed to turn back the clock to the winter evenings when she had waited for him to return from town.

She knew she could not reach Muddy Creek before darkness fell. She was not disturbed about that. She went back to her room when she had donned her coat again. There were many things there that were dear to her.

Her eyes fell on the little ebony case on its hook above her bureau. It was opened wide, revealing two

old daguerreotypes, side by side in their little gold frames. It was her mother and father.

She had no thought of taking it. It was hers, but it belonged here, even as she belonged.

When she had stepped outside, she did not move away at once. Here she had stood ten thousand times and gazed at the bay and the great lake beyond. So she stood there now, and drew great draughts of air into her lungs.

Eugene had told her where Victor had come ashore. She let her eyes run along the beach until they came to the spot, and then she could not look away. She thought of Jules and Eli. She saw them again, not as they were on that wild night when the *Heloise* went down, but strong, laughing giants here at Joe Chevalier, with a fine contempt for life.

She thought of what the *Curé* had said. Men had died, indeed, but surely if they had died in vain the fault was not hers. It was not so much that love was weak as that passion was strong. She had been only a pawn. And a pawn life would keep her if it could. Even *Monsieur le Curé* had been enlisted against her.

"Toinette shook her head defiantly as she faced the lake, and if she addressed any one it was the three who had gone down with the *Heloise*.

"No," she swore, "they shall not do this to me; they'll not make me marry Placide."

Her grandfather returned soon after she had left. He knew at a glance that she had been there. Beside himself, he kicked chairs out of his way, swept the dishes from the table.

"Come here, will she?" he shrieked like one possessed. "I'll show her!"

Proceeding to the kitchen he picked up the dinner she had cooked for him and hurled it through the window.

"I'll cook my own food," he cursed.

He was half way to the door when he stopped short. The smells 'Toinette's dinner wafted to his nostrils made him tremble. He sniffed once, and then again. His cursing fell away to an incoherent mumble. He looked about him surreptitiously as though some one were watching him. A groan broke from his lips, and the stiffness seemed to go out of his back. Reaching out with trembling hands he caught up the empty pot and licked it.

The aroma of browning biscuits reached his hungry old nostrils. He opened the oven and fell back before the treasure it held.

He was undone on the instant. He knew how he missed her.

"That girl!" he cried. "'Toinette! 'Toinette, where are you?"

He searched the cabin from end to end for her. His

eyes were wet, but he did not know it. Catching up a lighted lantern, he rushed outside in the snow and hunted until he found her tracks. For a quarter of a mile he followed her calling her name aloud and begging her to come back to him.

But 'Toinette was gone. Only once did his cry reach her faintly. It was eerie and far off. It hastened her on her way.

Placide was waiting for her. He was alone. A great sigh of relief escaped him as he beheld her.

"Wherever have you been?" he demanded sharply. "For the last two hours I have worried myself sick over you, imagining all sorts of things."

"The *Curé* is gone," 'Toinette countered guilefully, wondering whether or not she should admit having been home.

"He has been gone hours. He wasn't urged to stay."

Placide caught her arm and made her face him.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he demanded. "You knew what he came for. Was it because you thought I would say yes?"

"I couldn't tell you, Placide," she cried. "I didn't want you to know . . . I was afraid."

"Afraid that I would say yes?" He shook his head wearily. "How little you understand me, 'Toinette. Haven't I wronged you enough already? You laugh when I say I love you. Oh, I know it's hard to believe.

But I do; I love you too well to lose you forever by consenting to any such arrangement as your *Curé* proposes. I tell you they shall never *make* me marry you. They shall never take away from me the hope that some day you may care for me again."

'Toinette held her breath. There was fire in his voice again. It warmed something in her, even though she shook her head as she turned away. She was grateful, of course. . . . Maybe it was gratitude that sent the color to her cheeks.

"Oh, don't turn away, little one," he implored. "Do you despise me so? I'll do anything I can to right what I've done to you. I'm not going away. I can't stay here at Amador's much longer; but I shall stay on the bay. You know the *Curé* is not the only one who has spoken to me. There is Amador . . ."

"It would kill me, Placide," she murmured. "They don't understand."

Amador came then. His manner proclaimed at once that something was amiss.

"Antoine is not back yet?" he asked.

"He was going to Bonvouillor's to play cards to-night," Placide informed him.

'Toinette got supper. Through it all Amador had nothing to say. The hour following the evening meal had always been the most sociable one of the day. Gathered around the huge fireplace, Antoine would peel

and dissect great red apples with a knife sharp as a razor. Amador would smoke and spin interminable yarns about field and stream and his exploits as a hunter and trapper. Placide had his tales, too; and 'Toinette, close to the fire, would ply her long steel needles in time with the rise and fall of their voices.

To-night Amador stared moodily into the fire, his pipe cold in his lips. Placide tried to draw him out two or three times, but without success. At last, his patience at an end, he said:

"What's the matter, Amador? Something happen in town?"

Questioned with such directness, Amador could do nought but answer in kind.

"Sam refused to advance me any money on our skins."

This was so unusual as to cause Placide, who was well versed in the customs of the region, to sit up stiffly. 'Toinette dropped her needles and stared from one to the other. She knew everybody depended on their credit with Sam Drouillard to get them through the winter.

"What reason did he give?" Placide asked sharply.

"Said he was afraid of the spring-market."

"What bosh!" Placide exploded. "What is like to be wrong with the market? Skins are worth more every

year. Has he ever failed to take a good profit? You don't believe that was the reason, Amador?"

"No," Amador muttered dolefully.

"Oh," 'Toinette groaned and got to her feet. She understood and suddenly Placide did too.

"It's because you have taken us in . . . that's what is at the bottom of this," said he.

"He wouldn't admit it; but I asked him, and I guess that's it," Amador declared.

"Well, I can get out," Placide volunteered.

"No, it's not you, Captain. It's 'Toinette he's hitting at."

"I'll go too," she exclaimed bravely. "You've been too good to me to suffer on my account. I've been here a long time as it is."

Amador started to protest, but Placide cut him short. "I'll find a place for 'Toinette," he exclaimed. "It is only right that we should go."

"And I say no," Amador answered flatly. "I asked you here, and I am not sorry I did. When your leg is well, you can go, Captain, if you choose, but 'Toinette stays here. I've spoken to Dan La Pointe already; he is going to let me have what I need."

"But he can't pay you as much as Sam Drouillard," 'Toinette insisted. "You can not deceive me, Amador. I had better go."

"It's easy enough to talk of going," he scolded. "But

where are you to go? Placide can find a place. But you? If the two of you would only do as I have suggested—get married—it would put an end to all this. The *Curé* advises it too, you say.”

“He was here this afternoon,” Placide informed him.

“So? And what came of it?”

“Nothing! I told him he was wasting his time. He may mean well; I know you do. But Amador, were you to turn us out into the snow to-night, I’d say no. I won’t let you force ’Toinette into marrying me.”

“Why speak of force?” Amador exclaimed. He put his arm around ’Toinette and drew her close. “You know I would not force you to do anything, don’t you, little one? I’m too fond of you by far. I shall not speak of this again. It is only your happiness that I am thinking of. Since you two have discussed the matter and decided it is impossible . . . well, I shall not insist. Don’t go to bed to worry, ’Toinette. Had I my choice again I would not do differently. You are welcome here as long as you will stay.”

But of course she could not stay after this. New Year’s was only a day or two away. That over, she must leave.

“I’ll be hearing from Canada soon now,” she heard Placide say as she went to her room. “I’ll move into town when I do.”

How she wished that she had some place to hear from that promised such sure means of escape.

From her window she could see for miles across the snow. The cold stars twinkled in their blue tomb. Nothing moved. Life seemed to have gone from the earth, even as hope had gone from her.

But there must be some way out, some means of escape for her.

She found it at last. At first she wasn't sure. It was nothing so simple as receiving a letter from Canada. Viewed in certain ways it promised much, and then again it offered nothing.

But it was a way . . . a means of escape. Yes, they could not take it away from her. Come what would, she always had one way out . . . Cleophas, the rock in the storm! There was always Cleophas!

"God forgive me," she prayed as she cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XXV.

“NEW YEAR’S EVE.”

ON the day before New Year’s Placide received his answer from Canada; not by mail, as he had expected, but in person, for there alighted from the local train south that morning, a woman clad in such gorgeous raiment as Vienna had never seen.

All the way down from Wyandotte and Monroe she had held the attention and approval of the millinery salesmen returning to Toledo for the holiday, and not to her annoyance, either.

She was plump and pretty, too, if one could forgive the boldness of her dark, flashing eyes. There was something earthy and intoxicating about her in a purely animal way. Women sensed it, for they drew away from her instinctively. But it was easy to see that she had schooled herself to interest men, not women.

There was no one at the station to meet her. Xavier was on the platform. His roving eyes discovered her before she had even stepped off the train. He lost his *savoir-faire* at a glance. Man of the world, though he believed himself to be, his fancy never let him approach such magnificence as this.

He even forgot to preen himself as he stood stricken dumb and saw her look about uncertainly. Their eyes met then, and she smiled warmly. He thawed perceptibly at this and as she came toward him managed to doff his hat. To his surprise, she asked for Captain Labadee. Xavier raised his ears like a hound on a fresh trail.

Of course he knew where Placide could be found. And so it was that he drove the stranger to the cabin on Muddy Creek, and even though wisdom whispered that it would be more advisable for him to remain without, from the comparative safety of his cutter he missed but little of what followed, for he had asked his questions adroitly and was rather adept at putting two and two together.

Three of four times already this day visitors had come to the cabin, seeking Amador's services for the New Year. He had told them he was in no mood for fiddling. Young Esdras Bonvouillor had won him over finally.

"Maybe the old man won't be here next year," Esdras had pleaded. "This may be his last good time."

Judging by Esdras' loquaciousness and holiday air, the festivities at his home had not waited for evening, to begin. He insisted that Antoine return with him, there was so much yet to be done.

Antoine was not averse to this, and had Amador

not his traps to look after, he too would have been carried off by the boisterously happy young man.

Thus it was that 'Toinette and Placide were alone when Xavier drove up. They did not go to the window to look out, thinking only another had come seeking Amador's services.

'Toinette answered the stranger's knock. Her face went white as she recognized the woman whose photograph had adorned the cabin of the *Heloise*. 'Toinette surveyed her critically, noting the fine clothes and absurd hat. It was a cold, unfriendly appraisal, and her lips lifted contemptuously.

Without resorting to reason, she hated this woman. The stranger was just as cool, for Xavier had told her a thing or two.

'Toinette's eyes encountered him at that moment, leering at her, at pains not to be cheated out of gloating over her confusion. She threw her head up and stepped aside. What right had this woman there? She remembered, then, and smiled grimly to herself. Why shouldn't she come?

"If you want to see Captain Labadee, he is here," she announced pointedly, and as the woman entered, closed the door. Turning, she called to Placide.

He hobbled out of the kitchen presently. His eyes appeared about to pop out of their sockets as he saw

who wanted him. He groaned as he staggered backward, "Maria!"

Throwing out a hand, he caught himself and swayed groggily. He knew 'Toinette was there, watching him. How was he ever to explain this intrusion?

"Oh, my dear Placide!" the woman cried and ran forward to embrace him.

He put her off angrily. "You shouldn't have come here," he exclaimed. "When I wrote Ladouceur, I told him not to tell you. But he did, of course."

The woman drew herself up in front of him and gave him a withering glance. "Why shouldn't I come here?" she demanded. "You were not always so cool to me, Placide Labadee!"

'Toinette had no desire to overhear. But for Xavier she would have rushed from the house. At least she could go to her room. She was half way across the floor when Placide's visitor stopped her.

"Wait, mademoiselle!" she exclaimed. "I didn't come all the way from Canada to be shamed before you. Captain Labadee forgets. I loved him long before he ever saw you; and he loved me. He's my man and I'm going to have him. Are you fool enough to think he is serious with you?"

"Captain Labadee means nothing to me," 'Toinette hurled back at her. "He is yours to do with as you please!"

The woman tried to stop her again, but Placide brushed her back. "Go to your room, 'Toinette," he ordered.

Through the closed door she could hear them talking excitedly. They spoke of the money for which Placide had sent. She could hear his gruff answers, and at last the woman's voice, raised pleadingly as she implored him to go back with her.

"Go with her," 'Toinette wanted to shout aloud. "Go and never come back. You belong to her . . . why shouldn't you go?"

She beat her breasts frantically in her humiliation. Why did Xavier Drouillard have to be out there to hear, if not see, the awful truth? Was it that he might grin knowingly at her for the rest of her life?

An hour must have passed before she heard the outside door swing open and saw Maria walk slowly toward the waiting cutter.

Some time after they had gone, Placide knocked at her door. She refused to answer.

"I must speak to you, 'Toinette," he called.

"Go away—please," she answered finally. "There is nothing to be said."

He was persistent, but he could not get her to answer again.

Amador returned at noon. From the kitchen she could hear the drone of their voices. She wondered

just how much Placide was telling him. Later, she heard Amador get out the horse and sleigh. To her surprise she saw the old man help Placide into it.

Amador came back then and called to her.

"The Captain has to go to Monroe for his money," said he. "I'm going to drive him to town. I'll go to Bonvouillor's on the way back. Why don't you open the door, 'Toinette?'"

For answer, she did. Amador found her dry-eyed.

"Placide has told me," he explained. "It was not his fault. You know how young men live when they are footloose."

"I think I understand," she replied evenly.

"You don't mind being alone, eh?"

"Of course not."

"Well, Happy New Year, then, 'Toinette," and he gave her a hug. "I'll bring you something nice tomorrow."

When she was sure they were out of sight, she came to the door. She was hatless, but swathed in her heavy coat. She ran her fingers through her hair as the wind whipped it. The cabin had become unbearably oppressive, and it was a relief just to stand at the door and let the cold breeze fan her throbbing head.

She moved away from the cabin at last, walking rapidly. There was a hard crust on the snow; so she did not tire quickly. She knew better than to go to

the bay to-day, for there was sure to be a crowd gathering there already. Usually it was the great day of the year at Grandfather Chevalier’s. If for any reason he was not keeping open house, there were many others who were.

She had thought to throw off her loneliness, but thinking of New Year’s, and the festivities soon to be in sway wherever one might turn, made her even more miserable. Several times she had to change her course to avoid meeting some chance wayfarer.

When the afternoon was half gone, she began retracing her steps. Once she turned aside to explore Trabbic’s woods for bittersweet, a favorite New Year’s decoration.

She was back at the cabin before evening fell, tired but hungry. She got a bite to eat and built up the fires. The long shadows danced about the living-room as she sat inert by the fireplace. She was no nearer determining what she should do on the morrow than she had been when she left the cabin at noon, for she found it impossible to focus her thoughts sharply on anything. She knew she could not remain there another day. Where she was to go, or the manner of her leaving, were not half so important as that she left.

Eugene Malbay would be back from Monroe by noon. He had offered to loan her a small sum once,

enough to take her to Toledo. It would be running away. She had said they would not drive her out; how rashly she had promised herself that!

Thanks to Xavier, the whole countryside would soon know about the woman who had come to see Placide. There would be fresh laughter at her expense. Even now the two of them might be together in Monroe.

She laughed bitterly at the thought. She told herself it didn't matter; that she didn't care. But she did. And yet she argued that he was free to do as he pleased; that he meant nothing to her. How could he, hating him as she did? He had hurt her, and a savage desire to hurt him in turn took possession of her.

The stranger had mocked her coarse clothes and country manners. Every time she recalled the taunt it left a fresh wound. But there was truth in what she had said. She looked at her heavy shoes and woolen skirt and compared them to the visitor's finery. Had she been mad? How could she have hoped to hold Placide if she had wanted to?

Across the stillness there came to her ears the distant tinkling of sleigh-bells. Some reveller off to Bonvouillor's or other place where the lights were glowing and people were laughing, she knew.

It brought a fresh pang of loneliness, for New Year's had ever been a time of wonder to her. Christmas was

a sacred day, given over to going to church and prayer; New Year’s meant gay parties, toys for the children, new boots and shoes for the growing boys and girls, a bright scarf or a bit of ribbon for girls of her age.

For days, preparations had been going on for this night. Good things to eat, dishes seen but once a year, would appear. Grandfather Bonvouillor would make the punch his great-grandfather had learned the trick of from the English officers back in the old days at Fort Detroit. Grandfather Chevalier would match him with his spiced wine with great red apples bobbing in it.

There would be dancing; piling into bob-sleds twenty strong and dashing from one scene of gayety to another. In some cases the week would be over before the revellers returned home; eating and sleeping wherever they chanced to be, with a welcome assured no matter where they went.

Sometimes the sleds would overturn and pitch all out in the snow. What great good fun that was!—the young men rubbing snow into the girls’ faces and taking sly kisses before they could be bought off.

There would be singing—all the old songs! And the games!—bobbing for apples, blowing feathers, finding the wish-bone, which last year that foolish Papineau boy had hidden in the punch. And that clown, Fly-gette La Plante, doing tricks when his hair began to pull a bit from too much imbibing, so funny that even

Agathe, his wife, would laugh until the tears rolled down her cheeks.

The bells were nearer now. 'Toinette ran to the window and peeped out cautiously to see who might be passing. The night was bright, and down the road she saw a team coming swiftly. They did not slacken pace until they were in front of the cabin, and then with a flourish the driver wheeled them and brought them up trembling in the yard.

"Cleophas!" she cried. It was a cry of utter gladness. Despair scurried to cover. She was alive, laughing again!

She ran to the door and threw it open excitedly. "Cleophas!" she called. "Happy New Year!"

He called back a noisy greeting. "I'll put the team in the barn!"

"Wait, I'll get a lantern," 'Toinette exclaimed.

"I'm glad to see you, Cleophas," she told him, when the horses had been attended to. It was so honestly said that he was stirred out of his usual calm, and throwing his arms around her, gave a great bear-like hug. He was so huge and roly-poly in his bearskin coat that one rather expected him to growl at any moment.

His pockets were bulging with sweetmeats and presents. From the floor of the cutter he drew out a cane. 'Toinette looked at it a little fearfully.

“For Placide,” he explained. “I had old man Fiset make it. It’s stout hickory. I wonder what Placide will say.”

“Placide is not here; he has gone to Monroe.”

“Gone to Monroe?” he gasped. “I knew Amador would not be here, and perhaps not Antoine—but to leave you alone on this night . . .”

They were inside before Toinette had fully explained Placide’s absence. Cleophas looked about a little bewildered as he began emptying his pockets.

“You’re too good,” Toinette cried as she unwrapped a package and held up an embroidered shawl. “That’s no habitant shawl, Cleophas,” she trilled. “You never got it in Vienna.”

“You like it, huh?”

“I love it, Cleophas!”

She nibbled at the candies he brought, and the sugared fruit.

“Light the lamps,” she exclaimed, “all of them, while I run and change my dress. Why didn’t you let me know you were coming?”

“You don’t have to change your dress for me,” he protested.

“But I shall. Let us make New Year’s, too.”

The room was aglow when she came out again, radiant in her new shawl. She curtsied before him coquettishly. “Is it not beautiful?” she asked prettily.

Cleophas' eyes warmed. He had never seen her more desirable.

"You remember that old Madame Campeau from Wyandotte who used to visit in Vienna?" she smiled, "always so prim and nice?" and she threw back her head and mimicked the good lady to perfection as she paraded up and down the room.

Cleophas grinned, and they laughed together. Her gayety was not forced. She did not pause to wonder that she could laugh again. She got out wine and cider for him, and an immense bowl of apples.

"We should have pop-corn, too. There is a bag full hanging in the barn. Come, we'll get it together, and while you pop it I'll make honey cakes."

She raced him to the barn and held up the lantern while he got the bag down. They made such a merry time of it that they failed to hear the approach of a bob-sled full of merrymakers. They had covered half the distance back to the house before the strains of "*Brigadier*" stopped them in their tracks. The next instant the sled hove into sight. It was too late to escape being seen.

'Toinette did not mind having been left out. Had she been asked, she would have refused to go undoubtedly. And yet there was something poignantly terrible in having to face those who had ostracized her . . . in letting them see how well they had succeeded.

Cleophas felt it too, but he shrugged his shoulders scornfully.

'Toinette tried to extinguish the lantern.

"No," he exclaimed under his breath. "Pretend we don't see them. What do we care where they are going?"

The sled was passing now. Only for a second did the singing seem to die away . . . just long enough for 'Toinette to realize that they had been seen.

Standing up in the sled, thumping his guitar, was Dave Morrin. The sled was moving too rapidly for her to recognize the others. There was no word of greeting, no friendly wave of the hand, no sign of recognition from any of them.

The sled soon passed from sight, but the singing and laughter came drifting back sharp and clear across the snow. Cleophas' mouth was straight and grim, in his eyes the light of the potential killer, for he knew what they had just done to 'Toinette. His arms were about her as she buried her face against him, great sobs shaking her.

"Never mind, 'Toinette," he crooned softly to her. "They hoped to see you alone. They came this way to hurt you. That was Xavier driving." He raised his fists, huge as hams, unconsciously. "How much more can I bear from him?"

"You stayed away to be with me, didn't you, Cleophas?" she murmured brokenly.

"No," he lied bravely to ease the hurt they had given her; "I wasn't asked."

He had been asked, but the invitation had carried a reservation.

"I—I don't feel so bad now," she laughed piteously, a queer little catch in her voice; "both of us left out like this. I—I'm glad they saw you here."

"I wish they might always see us together." He caught her chin and made her look up at him. "I love you, Toinette. Why won't you marry me?"

She drew a great breath into her lungs as her eyes searched his patiently. Slowly she put up her hand and held it against his cheek.

"You really want me?" she whispered so low that he barely heard.

"More than I can say. Will you be my wife? I'm going to Toledo day after to-morrow. You could go with me."

Seconds passed as she stared and stared at him, trying to read her future in his eyes.

"Yes," she said at last, "I'll marry you, my Cleophas."

CHAPTER XXVI.

SPRING.

IN the eyes of the white man's world, marriage is the great absolver of sin; it is supposed to reclaim the wicked and give pause to the wayward. It is so the earth around, and Vienna proved no exception to the rule.

With surprising suddenness, 'Toinette found herself a person of no importance to the community. Despite the *Curé's* insistence that she marry Placide, and Amador's dire prophecy of unhappiness unless she did, life smiled at her again.

The *Curé* excused himself very readily. He had insisted only that she marry, he said. He had not believed Cleophas would wed her. Since Cleophas had, the Church and he were more than satisfied; and to prove his point and the efficacy of what he had advised, he showed 'Toinette the greatest consideration, and when visiting his parishioners, never failed to allude to her happiness and speak a word in her behalf.

Cleophas' family nodded their heads and agreed with him. Those others who had felt such a great indignation with her, were likewise satisfied, and before

spring had fairly come even the hardest gossip found 'Toinette an unprofitable subject for discussion.

Without taking any one into his confidence, Father Braire journeyed to the bay to see Grandfather Chevalier. His mission had been crowned with success, for almost immediately old Joe appeared at the Pecor home. Before he left, not only a complete reconciliation had been effected but he had 'Toinette's promise to return to the bay.

She had protested that the long trip twice a day would be too much for Cleophas. But Grandfather Chevalier had insisted; and Cleophas, to please 'Toinette who could not conceal her eagerness to go, had consented to the change.

Just before they moved out to the bay, 'Toinette met Placide. It was quite by accident. She understood he had been journeying back and forth between Monroe and Vienna frequently of late. He was hobbling along on the cane Cleophas had given him, lame for life.

He swept off his hat and with a smile parting his lips, bowed low with his old grace. For a fleeting second their eyes met and she saw with that awful clarity, which is vouchsafed to all of us at some time, just how irreparably she had hurt him.

He passed on then, without a word, and left her all breathless and uncertain of herself.

She went home directly and locked herself in her room. Her head throbbed madly, and in her feverish desire to critically review what she had done, she reduced herself to tears. For the first time she realized just how completely she had closed the door on what might have been. There was no going back now. She realized too, that for days she had been unconsciously avoiding Placide.

How vividly she could recall the look of his eyes as he had stood before her! He had cared, after all! How sure she was of that . . .

She had gone on, day after day, looking neither to right nor left, engaging herself with matters of trifling importance and refusing to admit that she was at all concerned about Placide.

She knew her mistake now!

Not all the king's horses nor all the king's men could have forced her to examine the state of her feeling for him. She was Cleophas' wife, and that was a barrier inviolate. But he had meant too much to her—had played too important a rôle in her life to be dismissed without a thought.

It was a time of relinquishment, in a way—a burning of bridges. She knew that she had dreaded this hour, unconsciously sensing it must come. But as often happens, when one walks in circles to avoid an ordeal and at last is made to face it, she felt better for it.

Her gayety of the past few weeks was gone; but it had been forced and unreal. She was relieved to be done with it. She knew she could go on—surer of herself than she had been.

Cleophas came home early and found her quite as usual. Two days later they moved to the bay.

Now, wherever she looked, there was work to be done. A wild orgy of cleaning and rearranging followed in which Grandfather Chevalier was caught as helplessly as a fly in a spider's web. It had been her petty tyrannies that he had missed as much as anything, and he submitted with rather good grace to her demands.

She was up before dawn to cook breakfast for Cleophas. It was always after dark before he returned. So, for weeks, she saw him by day only on Sunday. They never failed to go to mass; but once home from church, unfinished chores called them.

Marriage had worked some subtle change in both of them already. Day by day, Cleophas became more and more like his father, thrifty, even-tempered and silent.

With soil to till, the peasant came out strongly in 'Toinette. Spring was upon her in earnest now. The high water had receded. Fields had to be plowed; corn and potatoes planted; a truck patch made to bloom.

She did it all; toiling furiously for hours on end every day. Hard work, and more of it, always faced her. But she didn't mind. It took something out of her, of course, and she became careless of herself in the way peasants do when their bodies are engaged in making a living, when sleep is the sleep of exhaustion and pleasure means only resting.

Toil coarsened her hands, but it did not thicken her ankles nor make her broaden out in the way it has a habit of doing with most women. The youth that had been so markedly hers stayed with her. It was in her step and the flash of her eyes. Even when wearied with hours in the fields, she walked with shoulders thrown back, a real figure of a woman. There was something vital about her that work could never kill.

She was always hatless. Eugene saw her one day. The wind was whipping her short skirts about her legs, her hair was flying and in her eyes that unconquerable something which men have always answered to. He went away marvelling to himself. And yet, he knew she had changed, even as Cleophas had changed. Though that change had to do with marriage, it was less physical than mental; and it was not peculiar to them alone. With marriage, youth's resentment against toil and drudgery vanished. In even 'Toinette, there was a new and strange complacency,

an intangible acceptance of life's sterner realities that had not been there before.

He wondered if she ever thought of Placide and if she knew the Captain had returned to Canada.

'Toinette knew: Cleophas had told her. Her indifference had not been pretended, for the news came as less than a shock. But the following day she had hoed twice her usual number of rows of corn and potatoes.

She had felt he must go eventually, and there had been times when, unable to curb her roving thoughts, she had even prayed that he would go.

Grandfather Chevalier was so pleased with her that he asked her to accompany him to town. Everything was up and doing well, so she had no excuse for refusing. It was the first time she had been in Vienna, save Sundays, since she had returned to the bay.

Cleophas was shoeing a horse as they passed the forge. 'Toinette waved to him. He waved back and smiled good-naturedly, but he did not leave his work and run out for a word or two as he had always done in the old days.

Strangely enough, 'Toinette did not expect him to.

Grandfather Chevalier still traded with Sam Drouillard. As he drove old Honorine up to the hitching-rack he heard 'Toinette catch her breath. He glanced up a little surprised.

"What's the matter?"

"I—I guess I'll wait for you out here, Grandfather," she replied nervously.

"Why should you do that? You come with me; Sam's all right."

"But Xavier?"

"He isn't home!"

That made a difference, of course.

"All right, then," she murmured, but shook her head regretfully, wishing she had not come at all.

Hilarion Navarre still clerked for Sam. He stretched his long neck and peered at them over a cracker-box. A broad smile wreathed his face on recognizing 'Toinette. But Sam was in the store and he came bustling forward with all his old briskness, rubbing his hands like a money-lender.

"I'll wait on them, Hilarion," he called to his clerk, and turning to old Joe and 'Toinette beamed a hearty greeting.

'Toinette was so taken back that her knees wobbled in sheer surprise.

"*Well*, I began to think we never would see you here again, 'Toinette," Sam exclaimed. "What's the matter, Drouillard Brothers not good enough for you any-more? Or maybe you buy from catalogues now, eh?"

He laughed loudly and winking his eye gave Grandfather Chevalier a great dig in the ribs.

'Toinette mumbled a reply, but she was past being able to think. He never had been so affable. All the while they were in the store, he strove to outdo himself, and judging from his manner, the past year with all its bitterness might never have been.

"See?" Grandfather Chevalier exclaimed when they were on their way home. "I told you Sam was all right. He is a hothead, like me; but he is all right."

'Toinette was not convinced; her memory was too long. The next afternoon she went to Amador to ask him to explain. Amador rubbed his nose and nodded sagely.

"I'll answer your question by asking one," said he. "Do you know where Xavier Drouillard has gone?"

'Toinette shook her head.

"Well, he's in Canada with Placide."

"*What?*"

'Toinette could not believe her ears. Those two together? It was incredible.

"Captain Labadee hates Xavier," she exclaimed.

"Maybe he does," Amador agreed provokingly, "but they left together. Sam and your grandfather are putting up the money for Placide's new boat. Xavier went along to keep an eye on the cash."

"No, no! Amador. Don't tell me my grandfather is putting up any money for Placide. Why he never mentions his name. I know he has not forgiven him."

"He may not have forgiven him. But that isn't important. Enough that he hasn't forgotten. Your grandfather never forgets. But he loves a dollar! He'll get even with Placide if only through using him. He knows what he is about. There's local option west of Vienna now. That's going to mean a fortune to a few here on the bay."

Amador made out a good case before he finished. 'Toinette could not help believing him.

"But why hasn't Grandfather told me? He must see I'll find out some time."

"What you don't know doesn't hurt you," Amador declared as convincingly as though the words were his own.

In a daze, 'Toinette started toward home.

"Wait, I'll row you part of the way; I'm going over to Picard's."

"Why don't you ever come to our place? Grandfather often speaks of you," she asked when they were seated in the boat.

"Not until he comes here first!" Amador exclaimed vehemently.

'Toinette did not press the point. Not until he had put her ashore did Amador refer to her grandfather again.

"Joe may have his hands full before the year is out," he declared sententiously.

"Just how, Amador?" Toinette asked, caught by his tone.

"Well, Placide is the shrewdest of the lot. I have an idea he is after something more than money."

"Meaning what?" she persisted.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," and he dismissed her with a wave of the hand. "Nothing but this: some folks may feel the weight of his displeasure yet."

CHAPTER XXVII.

C A N D L E S.

EVERY morning for a week, 'Toinette scanned the bay anxiously for a glimpse of the schooner that was to replace the old *Heloise*. But never a vessel appeared, save the fishing-boats.

Other weeks followed, and no one came. She tried to draw out her grandfather; but he put her off, one way or another. The edge of her curiosity dulled with delay, and she had almost convinced herself that there was nothing afoot, when Cleophas informed her that Xavier Drouillard was back in Vienna.

Grandfather Chevalier went to town at once. The following day, Xavier departed again as mysteriously as he had returned. Not many days later Grandfather Chevalier had the bridge repaired at Sulphur Creek.

'Toinette surmised that these events were not unrelated, even though Grandfather Chevalier gratuitously explained that with the new bridge Cleophas would find it much easier traveling back and forth from town. That was true, of course; but if another schooner was to replace the *Heloise* that short road to Vienna was a necessity.

Had any doubt remained in her mind, the construction of a wharf and the repairing of the road through the woods would have removed it.

And yet Placide never came. The days grew hot. The roads lay deep in dust. Overhead the sun sailed lazily, a molten copper ingot. The corn ripened, and inland the fields of wheat turned a dull gold. Never a ripple marred the surface of the bay. The marsh grass drooped; blackbirds chattered noisily. In the truck patch great red tomatoes peeked out from their leafy coverlets; and just beyond them rotund pumpkins squatted on their little hills like self-satisfied Buddhas, their round bellies exposed to the fiery sun.

August was almost gone already. Man had done his work, and nature now was doing for him. With good crops assured, the talk of the countryside drifted to the horse-racing which annually made early September a time to look forward to, for where other communities had their fairs, Vienna had its harness racing to make merry over; and now, wherever men foregathered, wagers were made, improbable predictions voiced, and claims put forth so strongly for this horse or that, that the ensuing arguments often stopped just short of blows.

To a child, every one went to the races. The entries were largely local horses, with only one or two outsiders from Toledo and Monroe and Newport. They

were as well known to the bettors as their own children. There was Esdras Bonvouillor's gray gelding, for instance. He had never won a race; and yet Esdras would back him year after year, and his father likewise.

Dave Morrin would be there in his glory. He had a string of good horses; the best one a mare. She often knew the ignominy of pulling a plow or mowing-machine. For all that she could pace a mile in better than 2:30.

The spirit of rivalry more than made up for any lack of speed. The owners usually drove, and to see them come down the home-stretch, waving their whips and yelling at the top of their lungs was a sight not soon to be forgotten.

The half-mile dirt-track was located just out of town on the main road to Toledo. There, in later years, Erie Boy and the world-famous Cresceus were to make racing-history. Even then it boasted a grandstand as well as a number of smaller buildings which were usually rented out to makers of farm machinery and the like.

The ground inside the track was always put to corn every spring. As a consequence, the spectators lining the rail would see their favorites disappear from view before they reached the first quarter; and they would not catch sight of them again until they came thunder-

ing into the home-stretch. But there were always many willing to climb the fence and from such a vantage point shout the progress of the race to their less hardy companions on the ground.

The "hot-dog" was not yet; but the "hokey-pokey" ice cream-man was there; and shrewd fakirs, reaping a harvest with the old "shell" game and spinning-wheels which could be controlled by the operator's foot.

There was noise, color, fluttering flags and the music of Van Dorn's band, brought all the way from Toledo.

Under the grand-stand was a long bar where Dan La Pointe's bartenders served the thirsty as well as those who had long since lost their thirst.

Dan handled the money. He had a way of making the most of these days. With an unlighted cigar always in his mouth, and his long black coat and string tie, he was the very image of a Mississippi River gambler of the 'Sixties.

Between races there were always "open-air" attractions, free to all. Usually one of the Payette boys, who had been away with a circus, would walk the tight-rope. This year Professor Cole was to make balloon ascensions every day.

How could one stay away? In every cabin on the bay plans for going were made already. Grandfather Chevalier was as impatient as the youngest boy. For Cleophas, it meant the busiest week of the year, what

with so many horses to be shod, and with more than usual care, too.

'Toinette shared their excitement. Julie Picard and Delphine dropped in to show her their new hats, bought especially for the races. The next morning 'Toinette went to town with Cleophas, and when she came home that evening she had a new hat also, as well as other things.

The day before the races were to begin, Grandfather Chevalier brought home word that Xavier had returned again and had entered a horse.

'Toinette forgot to be surprised at his home-coming. "I suppose it's that mare Michigan Belle," she laughed. "She's always last."

"Xavier has a new sulky—you know with these pneumatic tires," Cleophas cautioned her. "It will make a difference."

"It is not fair to the others!" she exclaimed hotly.

"Why not?" Grandfather Chevalier demanded. "Is it his fault the others will use the high wheels? Anyhow, there's nothing any one can do about it."

Cleophas left at dawn the next morning as usual. Before noon, Grandfather Chevalier was off. Saturday would be the big day, however, and 'Toinette had decided to go then. She knew Cleophas and her grandfather would be present every afternoon.

It never occurred to her to question the fairness of

such an arrangement, any more than it would have occurred to any other girl on the bay.

And yet she found it difficult to put her mind to her work that afternoon. A light wind had sprung up and several times she thought she caught the distant strains of a band.

Toward evening the children gathered along the beach, hoping to catch a glimpse of the balloon. 'Toinette began to watch too, knowing the wind would bring it toward the bay.

The children discovered it first, as their wild shouting announced. As they watched, the parachute dropped like a plummet, then opened and gracefully settled down toward the earth. The balloon leaped upward, careening on its side, black smoke pouring from it in a cloud.

"It's coming this way!" the children cried.

It was very exciting.

"It's coming down!" a boy shouted a few minutes later.

The big bag began to drop rapidly. Soon it collapsed completely, and shrivelling up, hung against the sky for a second, a big dirty rag. It shot earthward then, a fine trail of smoke following it.

'Toinette had been completely absorbed. She was half way to the cabin before she became aware of a rig dashing madly down the road. She saw at a glance

that it was Cleophas. His face was white. He leaped to the ground before the horses had come to a stop and ran toward her.

He did not have to speak to tell her that something terrible had happened. His manner proclaimed the fact as vividly as words could have done.

He caught her. She saw there was blood on his shirt. She fought her way out of his arms.

"What is it?" she cried. "What's happened?"

Cleophas groaned and dropped his head.

"Your grandfather . . ." he began.

"He's hurt? He's . . ." she paused to read his eyes.

"Oh-h-h," she groaned. "Cleophas, *he's dead!*"

Slowly Cleophas nodded his head. 'Toinette's hands flew to her mouth as though she would force back the words she had uttered.

"A train hit him—a Michigan Southern train. He must have been asleep—you can see so far at that crossing. He was drinking all afternoon. I told Dan not to let him have any more. I suppose he got it in town . . . they're bringing him here now."

She had long since completely forgiven her grandfather, and as she fell back before the onslaught of the news of his death, she knew only that she had loved him and that he was gone.

Cleophas led her inside the cabin. He was a boy again, tender and gentle with her.

"Was it you who found him?" she gasped, her voice choking her.

"No, I came along just after it happened; but a crowd was there already. Some blame the old mare. I don't. She's almost blind, but she knew that crossing. She stopped, like as not. In his sleep he must have yanked the reins and sent her ahead."

"She was killed, too?"

"No, Honorine is all right."

Flygette LaPlante knocked and came in looking very solemn for all of his holiday-making red tie and celluloid collar. He nodded to 'Toinette, and stood at the door nervously running the brim of his hat through his fingers.

"It's too bad, 'Toinette," he muttered huskily. "I guess it would be better for you to go in the kitchen until we bring him in. Monsieur Grimaud will be here to-night. You wait until he comes before you see your grandfather, eh?"

She nodded, for she understood.

The news spread rapidly, and all evening neighbors, near and distant, came with a word of consolation. It was hard to believe that some of those who were solicitous of 'Toinette now had pointed the finger of suspicion at her only a few months back.

The *Curé* and M. Grimaud, the undertaker, with his white gloves and long black wagon, came together; one

to shrive the spirit and the other the flesh of the departed.

Father Braire's presence brought a great sense of peace to 'Toinette. He lighted his candles and placed them beside the dead, and the dead seemed no longer so far away. He prayed, and his mellow Latin phrases hallowed the air. The Divine Father seemed to draw near. As His spirit hovered over the cabin, 'Toinette felt again, with all the faith of her childhood, the *Curé's* greatness.

How quickly he could strike a balance between one's Heavenly liabilities and assets! How familiar he was with the ways of death! If the ardor and complete assurance with which he addressed the Holy Throne could not win forgiveness for sinners, what could avail?

The following day but one, they bore Grandfather Chevalier to the little cemetery west of Vienna.

Through it all 'Toinette moved rather uncertainly. She had been denied that preparation for death which is given those who see loved ones fail day by day until the end heralds its own coming. Grandfather Chevalier had gone to town alive and well; and they had brought him home dead. It was a fact, of course. And yet she found it difficult to comprehend. Often,

even on the way to the cemetery, she caught herself thinking of him as still among the living.

The delusion stayed with her through the days which followed, and often, when in the fields, or busy about the cabin, she found herself about to appeal to him in regard to some matter or another. It left a fresh hurt always.

At such times as she clearly realized that he had gone forever, she felt terribly alone. In vain did she remind herself that she had Cleophas.

She fought her loneliness. But it was no sooner put to flight than it returned. Work was the only antidote she knew; but even work's subtle numbing of the senses failed to heal the ache in her heart.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WITHOUT WORDS.

GRANDFATHER CHEVALIER left no other heir. The cabin was 'Toinette's now, as well as all his marsh-land and savings.

She knew nothing about the law, nor did Cleophas; so they called in Philéas Leroux, the notary public.

Philéas always found it profitable to be vague. To his clients, he painted the law as a devouring octopus, which it were better to placate than antagonize. It required time and great patience.

He spoke so profoundly and dwelt at such length on the intricacies of settling an estate that 'Toinette felt that whatever fee he charged would be less than enough.

A few days after she had consulted him, Philéas came to the bay. It seemed he had found Placide's note for fifteen hundred dollars among Grandfather Chevalier's papers.

'Toinette and Cleophas looked at each other. The note told its own story.

Philéas was somewhat put out at their lack of enthusiasm over his news. He had come in a jubilant mood. Couldn't they appreciate such a windfall?

Especially since Sam Drouillard, to whom he had mentioned the matter, had offered to take up the note for Captain Labadee.

"You see, 'Toinette, how hard I am working for you?" he queried and spread his arms as if inviting inspection. "Fifteen hundred dollars is a handsome sum. This may not be all, either. If you will take my advice, you will accept Mr. Drouillard's generous offer . . . I prefer the cash always."

"We'll think it over," Cleophas answered for 'Toinette. "I may see you to-morrow."

When Philéas had left, Cleophas spoke frankly.

"There is the wharf," said he. "Who does that belong to? If Sam Drouillard wants to take up this note, let him come to you. Placide may have had some cash as well as the note from the old man."

"There'd be a receipt for it; you know how grandfather was with money. I wouldn't take the Drouillards' side against Placide," she went on after a moment. "Placide might not want us to do this."

Cleophas snapped his fingers impatiently.

"They're as thick as thieves. You needn't worry on that account. But let us wait."

That evening Sam came in person.

He disavowed any claim to the wharf. He offered, however, to either rent or buy it.

"I'll give you a fair price for it," said he. "I'd have to have the land that goes with it."

"I couldn't sell that," Toinette replied. "It isn't worth much, I know, but I couldn't sell it."

"I'm not anxious for it. I'll give you five dollars a month for the use of the wharf and the road. It'll help out a little bit. Now as for cash—I don't believe the Captain has had a cent from your grandfather. When I spoke to Philéas about buying the note, I thought only to help you. You knew about the note, eh?"

"Well—no."

"I hardly thought you did. Your grandfather was peculiar, you know. I daresay you surmise what the money was used for."

"I think I do," Toinette nodded.

"Well, when I went into this venture with your grandfather and the Captain—it was my idea—it looked profitable. But its success depended on Joe. Now that he is gone, I am not so sure we'll make money. The three of us had certain ideas; we knew what we wanted to do. Now you are our partner—and you may not always agree with us. If that happens, we all lose. So, you see, in offering to buy the note, I am thinking of myself, too. I don't deny it. But it would be the best thing for you, also. You will have your money and nothing to worry about."

As soon as Sam established a selfish motive for his

offer, Cleophas' antagonism vanished. He had been trying to discover it himself. As revealed, it did not seem unreasonable: Sam could not be blamed for wanting to protect himself.

Without realizing it, down deep in his heart Cleophas was averse to having 'Toinette connected with any business that concerned Placide. The feeling was strong enough to place him on Sam's side.

'Toinette was quite willing to do as he wished. In due time the money was turned over to her. The possession of so huge a sum, quite beyond her dreams, worked no change in either Cleophas or herself. Both toiled as hard as ever. She got in the potatoes and corn; canned great quantities of tomatoes; dried beans and peppers. Cleophas had the winter's wood to gather and split.

Days crept by. Quail called from the stubble. The winds sharpened as if already testing their strength for the storms to come. 'Toinette never wholly threw off her feeling of loneliness. She knew Cleophas was worrying about her, and for his sake she tried to appear happy and contented. But he came home early one evening and found her in tears.

"Let us move back to town," he suggested. "It's too lonely here for you, 'Toinette."

"I'd be more lonely in town," she murmured. "I couldn't leave the bay."

He wanted to be kind to her. She was working too hard, perhaps. No, she loved to work.

"Well, we'll drive over to Monroe after mass next Sunday," he suggested. "The trip will do you good. I'll send word to my aunt Philomene to expect us."

'Toinette's moodiness was not proof against such a suggestion. With what longing had she often contemplated a trip to Monroe! It had always seemed quite unattainable, and yet, here was Cleophas suggesting it quite as casually as though he were asking her to go to mass.

Sunday was only two days away. She arose early the next morning. The weather had turned warm. The sky was cloudless and over the water and distant hills a blue haze hung lazily.

"Indian summer has come at last," Cleophas announced. "Time to get the hay in."

When he had left, 'Toinette packed her lunch-basket and got out old Honorine and the mowing-machine. Their marsh-hay grew wild, of course, a patch here and a half-acre there. At times that day 'Toinette was near enough to Muddy Creek to see Amador's cabin.

She had often done much harder work, but the day was hot and the hay dry. Before evening, she was thoroughly tired.

Cleophas had returned before she got back home. He was standing on the new wharf watching a small boat

come ashore. 'Toinette's eyes leaped beyond him to the open bay. There a schooner rode the lazy swells as gracefully as a swan, her white paint shimmering in the setting sun.

"*It's Placide!*" she gasped, and throwing down the reins, leaped to the ground and ran forward four or five steps before she caught herself.

The small boat had been beached. Men leaped out and pulled it beyond reach of the water. A figure, tall and upright, detached itself from the others and tramped toward her across the wet sand.

It *was* Placide—lame, but unchanged for all that. His head was thrown back and he was as swaggering a figure as ever he had been.

'Toinette trembled and glanced at herself, hating her dishevelment and broken-down shoes and faded dress. But there was no escape for her, now. Placide paused to shake hands with Cleophas. The next second he was bowing before her. Sam had written him about her grandfather. Dumbly she heard him say he was sorry for her. All the while, however, they scrutinized each other, and her blood raced through her veins . . . Did he find her changed? Did he suspect the secret which only she and Cleophas knew?

"She's a fine boat," Cleophas said.

"Yes! But no better than the *Heloise*. I hope she proves as stout."

He asked 'Toinette to fetch her grandfather's long glass. When she brought it he bade her read the name painted on the stern of his new vessel.

"*T-h-e A-n-t-o-i-n-e-t-t-e*," she spelled out, letter for letter.

"Your grandfather insisted on that. It was to have been his surprise for you."

"It's beautiful, Placide." She asked him to stay for supper, but he borrowed a horse and rig from Cleophas and went to town immediately.

'Toinette got supper. She could not conceal her excitement. Cleophas noted it and said nothing. The dishes washed, 'Toinette changed her dress and came out and sat beside him on the bench outside the cabin door. They found little to say.

"Should we have spoken about the note?" she asked rather timidly at last.

"Sam will tell him." His tone was almost gruff.

Placide did not return. That night there was a great deal of activity at the wharf. In the morning, the *Antoinette* was gone.

The following week, Placide came again. It got to be quite as common to see the *Antoinette* riding at anchor just before evening as it had once been to see the *Heloise*.

That first meeting had found 'Toinette unprepared.

She was not caught again . . . a ribbon in her hair, a gay sash, her best shoes!

Cleophas knew. He came to associate them with the arrival of the schooner, even as he did her heightened color and fluttering hands.

If Placide stopped, it was for no more than a word. And yet Cleophas grew to hate him. He suffered, and he could not give his suffering articulation.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AND THE YEARS RUN ON.

WINTER came, growling and fuming as of old. It brought a son to 'Toinette. They called him Etienne, after his paternal grandfather. His coming left her busy enough. She lavished all her store of love on him and won a strange and abiding sense of contentment in return.

Azalma came just before the New Year, to invite them to her place.

"Captain Labadee is back in Vienna," she informed 'Toinette before she left.

Azalma glanced at her furtively.

'Toinette nodded. "So Cleophas told me," she lied, wondering just what Azalma had hoped to read in her eyes at this news.

"Folks say Sam has found his new partner a hard nut to crack," she ran on.

"I guess they've made money," 'Toinette replied.

Azalma threw up her head. She had not expected to find 'Toinette so willing to discuss Placide. "They're welcome to all they make," she said tartly.

'Toinette smiled to herself. A few days later she

encountered Placide at the store. The baby was in her arms. Placide raised his hands to take him, but the baby drew back.

Placide's face flushed, and a strange expression flitted across his eyes. "Don't be afraid of me," he smiled. Then: "He's a fine boy, 'Toinette." He put out his finger and touched the little fellow's cheek. "Hasn't Sam something I can buy him?"

Sam came forward, grinning broadly. "What do you think of him, eh?" he demanded of Placide.

'Toinette thought they seemed on the most amiable terms. Sam squandered a quarter of an hour helping Placide select a toy for the baby. Other customers waited with growing impatience. But he didn't seem to mind.

Cleophas appeared none too well pleased when she related the incident to him.

"We ought to give Dan a little of our trade," he grumbled. "He gives me all his work."

"Why, of course, if you say so," 'Toinette told him. "You never suggested it . . ."

They dropped the matter, but thereafter 'Toinette seldom went into Drouillard Brothers.

One afternoon in March, Cleophas' father drove up to the cabin. It was unusual to see him there at such an hour. 'Toinette was alarmed immediately.

"Nothing to get alarmed about," the old man ex-

claimed. "That stallion of Ed Lavigne kicked Cleophas this noon. We took him over to my house so he could lie down. It'll be better if he stays there to-night. I came out to tell you so you wouldn't worry."

"Is he hurt?" she demanded breathlessly.

"Hurt?" old Etienne echoed derisively. "Of course not! A horse couldn't hurt Cleophas. He's been kicked a dozen times."

'Toinette and the baby went back to town with him. Cleophas seemed to be resting easily.

"I'm all right," he told her. "I'll be up to-morrow."

But he never shod another horse. He lay for a week, growing worse steadily, before 'Toinette could convince his father that they should send for a doctor.

When Dr. Morrin came from Toledo, he shook his head. He called in other doctors. Day after day they came and always they shook their heads. Maybe he would get well: maybe he wouldn't. They couldn't tell.

Spring came. 'Toinette went to the bay by day to do the planting and returned to Vienna at night to watch over Cleophas. He seemed to grow no worse now. But he could not get well.

The days grew warmer, and Dr. Morrin approved 'Toinette's suggestion that it would be better to move Cleophas to the bay.

Summer passed rapidly. Before it was over, the large sign above Drouillard Brothers' store came down.

A new one was put up, and it read *Drouillard and Labadee*. Azalma told 'Toinette that Sam was building an apartment house in Toledo with the money he was making. Xavier was looking after it for him.

'Toinette no longer took Azalma's gossiping to heart, and yet it was true enough that Sam was seldom in Vienna any more. At such times as he appeared, he was more prosperous and business-like than ever.

He closed the great house which 'Toinette had often regarded with secret longing, and which Dan La Plante had always ridiculed. The once closely-cropped lawn now grew knee-high. The iron lion which had long squatted so peacefully in the front-yard, took on new animation, and, from the road, appeared to be skulking through a sea of waving greenery.

The hottest day of the year came that September. 'Toinette would lug Cleophas to the door and let him lie there, fanned by the light breezes from the bay.

It was hard for her—doing all the work in the fields and caring for the baby and him. Cleophas was not a good patient. He lost his placidity and become morose and sharp-tempered with her.

'Toinette made excuses for him and never lost patience, telling herself his illness was to blame. But it was something more than the despair of not being able to get well that was eating into Cleophas' soul.

Eugene and Amador came over several times to help

her. But they had their own work to do. Who hasn't when he is poor?

At regular intervals, the *Antoinette* arrived at evening and vanished before dawn. Placide often stopped at the cabin for a word with them or to leave some trinket for the baby.

Cleophas greeted him with growing coldness that culminated finally in studied hostility. Placide felt Cleophas' antipathy and distrust long before 'Toinette was conscious of it. Inexpressible embarrassment came to her with the realization. After that she found it impossible to meet his eyes.

Placide did not stop again. If he caught sight of either Cleophas or her, he would wave a greeting with his hand—that was all. And yet that simple gesture fortified 'Toinette. If her courage ebbed low and it seemed she could not go on, she had but to see him come ashore and stand for a brief second, hat in hand, looking for her, to be sustained.

At nine months, her baby was big and strong; already resembling her, and giving evidence of having inherited her fire. As all young mothers know, her affection for him grew even as he grew. When she had work to do in the fields, she packed him into a basket and took him along. She'd make him comfortable in some shady fence-corner and go on about her work,

and it was no unusual sight, to see her at one end of the field, singing to him at the other end.

Before the month was out she was awakened in the night to find blood streaming from Cleophas' mouth. Screaming, she ran all the way to Amador's for help.

Dr. Morrin came soon after daylight. He did not shake his head this time, but he was very grave. He stayed and stayed. News of his presence spread. Amador and Eugene, Azalma and Agathe La Plante and one or two others came and stood about expectantly.

Under the doctor's ministration Cleophas rallied slightly. At noon, however, he told 'Toinette to send for the *Curé*. All bowed their heads, for it was equivalent to pronouncing a sentence of death.

Eugene dashed away madly for town. He had been gone but a few minutes when Cleophas lapsed into unconsciousness. The end was nearer than even the doctor had supposed. In his last few minutes Cleophas seemed to throw off his suffering and care, and again become the boy he had been. A smile wreathed his worn face. He groped blindly for 'Toinette! She caught his hand and held it until it began to grow cold.

At her request, Azalma and Agathe led her outside and walked up and down the beach with her. She knew Cleophas was dead: she had seen him die, day by day, for weeks. Where there had been something incredible

about her grandfather's death, there was a horrible certainness about Cleophas' passing. And it was not for the husband she had just lost whom she grieved, half so much as for the man who had stood by her when all the rest of the world had crashed about her ears. She saw him running out to meet her as she drove past the forge—as a boy on the bay. It all seemed such a short time ago.

And so, again the *Curé* and his candles; again Monsieur Grimaud.

'Toinette shook her head: it seemed impossible to escape them. She suddenly saw something almost ghoulish about the way they traveled together here and there, one coming for the soul, and the other the body of young and old, sinner and saint.

Azalma met Eugene a few days after the funeral. They spoke of 'Toinette.

"She'll move to town, now," Azalma declared. "She couldn't stay in that place any more."

"Why not?"

"It would drive her crazy."

Eugene shook his head. "No," he ventured, "I don't believe 'Toinette will leave the cabin. Why should she?"

"She has money to move into town if she wants to."

Eugene smiled to himself. He understood Azalma perfectly. He might have told her that neither money

nor the lack of it would have anything to do with 'Toinette staying on the bay. But then, Azalma would hardly have understood.

Of course, 'Toinette had no thought of giving up the cabin. The old place was peopled with memories for her,—gay as well as sad—many of which time would never lay. But life is mostly memories.

Almost two weeks passed before the *Antoinette* appeared again. 'Toinette saw her standing outside at evening. The wind failed completely before sunset, so it was dark before the schooner dropped anchor. A few minutes later, Placide came ashore.

'Toinette was watching him from the shelter of her window. She wondered if he would stop. She knew Hilarion must have written him about Cleophas.

A young moon shed its vibrant light upon the beach. She saw Placide stand on the wharf for long, long minutes, staring at the cabin. There was something in his attitude that said he knew. He replaced his hat and straightened up.

Even at such a distance it was plain to see that he had reached a decision. The next instant he was striding briskly away from the wharf.

'Toinette caught her breath. She knew he could not see her, hidden by the black shadows of her room. And yet, there was something momentous in every step he took toward her.

He had covered half the distance to the cabin when he slowed his pace. He took another dozen steps, then stopped; and having stopped, could not go on again. His determination ran away from him. He sighed heavily. 'Toinette heard distinctly.

Her heart missed a beat. He was so near that it seemed she would have had but to whisper his name to bring him to her side. He stood uncovered with bowed head, the moonlight touching his hair. She saw him nod as he communed with himself—regretfully, she thought. Raising his arms, he held them out, as though he actually saw her, and then, turning, began to walk away.

She could have called to him—even then; it was not too late. But she did not speak. Her eyes were wet, but not a sound passed her lips. . . . How could she have spoken?

CHAPTER XXX.

MERRY-GO-ROUND.

BEFORE Winter set in again, the sign on what had once been the establishment of Drouillard Brothers came down and a newer one went up. It read: *P. Labadee and Company*. The company was mythical. As Amador had prophesied, local option west of Vienna had proved profitable for some.

Xavier and his father came to town only at long intervals. Some said they were not so well off as they pretended. A tale from Toledo had it that several of Sam's investments had not turned out as he expected. He was even quoted as saying that he was sorry he had given up the store.

Those in a position to know, knew he had been forced out. He had needed cash, Placide had supplied it and dictated the terms on which the loan was made. There had been a second and a third loan, and what remained to Sam of the business which had once belonged to Drouillard Brothers had been put up as security. The day came, as it has a habit of doing, when the notes fell due. Sam found himself unable to make good. He pled extenuating circumstances and begged for

extensions; but to his everlasting chagrin he found himself appealing to one whose heart had turned to stone as far as he was concerned.

It was a bad half-hour for Sam. He was made to see that he owed a larger debt than any debt of dollars, and when he would have begged for mercy, Placide reached back into the past and confronted him with memories whose fangs were sharp with long waiting.

The time came, before spring, when everyone knew; so there was no great surprise when Sam's house changed hands. It was in Placide's name now.

"I guess he got it cheap enough," Dan La Pointe declared to his cronies.

"He wouldn't have bought it, otherwise," they agreed.

No one ascribed any sentimental reason to his purchasing the place. Only 'Toinette wondered.

Painters came. The house and lawn were put in order. Vienna waited for Placide to move in. He disappointed his neighbors, for he continued to dwell in his rooms over the store. Month followed month, and the big house remained empty. Summer and fall and winter all ran together. If a gutter needed repairing or the lawn cutting, it was attended to at once; but the house never had a tenant.

It became an object of wonder. Dan La Pointe found it more intriguing than ever. He spoke to 'Toi-

nette about it. She shook her head; she didn't know anything about it. She seldom saw Placide. She traded entirely with Dan; it was easier than facing Placide. But time dulls curiosity, and Vienna forgot to wonder.

The years threw themselves at 'Toinette. People took sick; others died. Placide got rich. The *Antoinette* came no more; he was beyond need of that dangerous business any longer. She seldom permitted herself to think of him. But then—one does not have to think of an ache to be aware of it. A living was to be made—that was ever before her. But neither her dreams nor her youth slipped away with the passing years. Little Etienne passed from babyhood to boyhood. At five he was playing such pranks on her as she, at his age, would never have dreamed of visiting on her grandfather.

Other boys of his years along the bay were beginning to become interested in guns and traps and boats. Etienne was no different than the others; he wanted to hunt and fish, too. So, in lieu of a father, 'Toinette became his mentor, scouring the woods and creeks on strange adventures.

It was good for her. It kept her young and close to him.

At rare intervals, Eugene came and sat on the beach with her, watching the changing lights over the water.

He made her see beauty that she felt but could not express. He spoke of distant places and painted glowing pictures of great ladies and gentlemen.

It satisfied a craving for something which she could not define. The walls of her world seemed to move back, and she lost her feeling of futility.

The *Curé* came regularly. He was more rotund than ever. His face seemed too ruddy for good health. He spoke well of Placide.

"I never see him at mass," she murmured dryly.

A curious twinkle came into the *Curé's* eyes, and he looked down the length of his nose. "No," he admitted, "but he is very liberal. And I have found him an excellent judge of the best Chartreuse. But speaking seriously, 'Toinette, I'll win him back yet.'"

Before leaving he won 'Toinette's promise to send Etienne to school for religious instruction that October. He was young, the *Curé* admitted, but it was impossible to get them too young.

October was still a month away when engineers with surveying instruments appeared on the bay. Close on their heels came Sam Drouillard. His pockets were lined with cigars. He had a noisy greeting and slap on the back for every one he met. He made a great to-do about being home again. To his awed listeners he explained that he was going to build a summer resort, there on the bay.

He pictured hotels and bathing beaches and great crowds of visitors so enthusiastically that men and women turned away wondering if he had lost his mind. When he offered thirty-five dollars an acre for land, under water half the year, they were sure of it. But there was money in his pocket, and crazy or not, they accepted his offer.

He came to see 'Toinette. He told the same story to her.

"They laugh at me now," he declared. "But wait! Before I'm through you won't know this place!"

They were standing outside the cabin. He stepped back and viewed the immediate landscape critically.

"I could build a hotel here, right on this spot. Where could I find a better place? There's the beach. There isn't a better one anywhere! I tell you, before I'm through I'll have docks there where we built the new wharf for the captain. You'll see steamboats landing thousands of people every day from Toledo."

Just where all the money was to come from for these great improvements remained a mystery. Even Sam seemed to be rather vague on this point. 'Toinette was skeptical, of course. But Sam offered to pay her in cash as he had the others. Thirty-five dollars an acre seemed a great price for land that could produce nothing better than a scant crop of marsh-hay. She had eighty acres, or more. Maybe she could let him have

part of it. She'd have money to send Etienne to school at Monroe, then.

But Sam shook his head. "No, 'Toinette, I've got to have it all. Why do you want to keep the cabin—it's falling apart."

He grew very confidential.

"Listen," he whispered, though no one was in a quarter of a mile of them, "I'm going to make you a special price. I always was a good friend of your grandfather; I want to do the right thing by you. You keep this to yourself . . . I'll give you thirty-two hundred dollars for the place. You'll be fixed for life. If you want to stay on the bay, you can buy a few acres beyond Eugene's place and build a new cabin. It's just as good land as this."

"I'd have to keep the cabin," she insisted.

Sam came up to thirty-five hundred, but she still said no. He switched to tactics of another sort.

"All right, you keep your place," he declared with a wave of relinquishment, "I don't need it; I can buy plenty of land."

He started to get in his buggy. 'Toinette wondered if she were not making a mistake, after all.

"You'll be on the bay to-morrow?" she asked, wavering.

"I may," Sam answered without encouragement, quick to catch her indecision.

"I may change my mind," she admitted, anxious for him to understand that negotiations were not hopelessly off.

"Think it over. If I have time, I'll see you tomorrow."

He drove away convinced that before another twenty-four hours passed he would have the place.

The talk on the bay that night concerned only Sam's scheme. Three or four neighbors dropped in to find out what 'Toinette had done. They had sold and were glad of their good fortune. They convinced 'Toinette, and she went to bed wondering if Sam would come back in the morning.

But morning brought Placide. He came at a gallop, more concerned than ever she had seen him. He ignored the fact that he had not been there in years; that time had made them almost strangers. Without wasting a word on formalities or explanations he wiped out the intervening years for her, too.

"Have you sold the place, 'Toinette?" he demanded no sooner than he entered the cabin.

"No," she managed to say, although her surprise at seeing him tightened her throat and made her voice sound strange and unfamiliar.

"Thank God!" he sighed with relief.

She noticed how he limped as he walked across the room and sat down. She found him greatly changed.

There was less of the sea about him than there had been. There was new authority in his voice. He was handsomer, too. She had never seen him so richly dressed.

She noted his stiffly starched white cuffs with their gold links, his brocaded wesket and embroidered scarf. He was now in reality not unlike the grand seigneurs whom Eugene had described so graphically. His eyes flamed as of old as she related her conversation with Sam.

"He'll come to-day," Placide declared. "If I know anything, he'll come before noon. When he does, you tell him you have decided not to sell. Offering you thirty-five hundred dollars!" he exclaimed contemptuously, and he brought his hand down on his leg with a resounding whack. "Why, you'll get thirty-five thousand, not hundred!"

"Toinette gasped, so convincing was he. She could not comprehend such a huge sum. She only knew it was tremendous, beyond dream or fancy. And yet, now that he was there, selling at any price no longer seemed the most important thing in the world.

"Then there is something to all this talk, eh?" she asked more evenly than she supposed.

"Of course! The Toledo Traction Company is going to build an electric railroad out here. This idea of making the bay a pleasure resort is theirs, not Sam Drouillard's. He got wind of it. He bought some land,

I know. If you had said yes, the Traction Company would have had to deal with him, and at his own price, for almost the whole right of way from here to Half-way Creek. He'll make a pretty sum on what he bought. But as for not wanting your place—humph! The beach is what they need. It's yours, and they'll pay high for it. This talk of his about steamboats and wharves is fiction."

"Toinette held her breath. She was glad Placide did not know how close she had come to selling—a word more and she would have closed with Sam.

"You won't have to sell the cabin. They will buy what you'll let them have," he assured her. He looked around the room. "You keep it well," said he. "Nothing has changed—not even you."

"Toinette felt the blood pounding in her cheeks. She saw him reach out and pick up a little pewter pitcher from a shelf in back of his chair. He fingered it tenderly.

"It must have been ten years ago or more that I brought you this little pitcher," he mused aloud.

"All of that," she murmured. Now that the conversation had taken a personal turn she found it twice as hard to appear at ease.

Placide seemed to be in no hurry to leave. He spoke of this one and that, of little Etienne and his schooling, of the old days there at Joe Chevalier.

He reached for his hat at last. As he got to his feet he started to speak, then paused, as if searching for words. They reached the door before he made another attempt. "About selling the place," he said slowly, "why don't you let me take care of that for you, 'Toinette. Have you faith enough in me to trust me with it?"

He might have had the soul out of her body had he but asked. And still she found it possible to say that she couldn't ask him to devote his time to such a simple matter as selling the place for her.

"It doesn't matter how much time it takes," said he. "I want to do this—I want to get every cent I can for you."

She was so anxious not to appear eager to accept his offer that she made him ask again before she gave her consent.

As he was leaving, he raised her hand to his lips. She felt him tremble, and he looked away and closed his eyes. She saw the hand holding his hat tighten until the knuckles were white.

Neither spoke. The moment transcended words. And yet, if it held such ecstasy for him how infinitely more it meant to her.

Etienne came in a few minutes after Placide had left. He found his mother in tears.

"Why are you crying, mother?" he asked.

"Oh, because I'm so happy," she cried, "so happy, my son," and she caught him up and hugged and kissed him madly.

What a good excuse acting as her agent gave Placide for coming again! It came to be a familiar sight to see him driving his blooded mare down the dirt road which led to the bay. Old women whispered among themselves; the young ones smiled; the *Curé* nodded knowingly. Life went on, didn't it? thought he. Check-mate here, advance there, change, sorrow, happiness! Eventually everything worked out its own solution. . . . What a wise Providence!

Before long Placide announced that he had closed with the railway company. He had received fully as much as he had promised he would. Immediately thereafter, a small army of men armed with plows and scrapers appeared and set about changing the face of the earth.

Placide's visits did not stop with the sale of the place. Indeed, he came more frequently than ever. In October, when the harvest moon hung low over the water like a great fat pumpkin, too heavy to rise, 'Toinette and he would sit on the beach, speaking but seldom, dreaming dreams and drinking in a great contentment just from being together.

The time came when he spoke to her of the great house in Vienna, just as Xavier had done, and Xavier's

father. He told her it was hers, that he had bought it for her—the house she had always wanted, with the iron lion and the wire fence.

“It’s been waiting almost four years for you, ’Toinette,” he said wistfully, his eyes riveted on the distant horizon as though out there he saw the ship of his dreams making port at last.

She pressed her cheek against his. “Has it been that long, Placide?” she whispered.

He drew her close and kissed her tenderly.

“We might have been happy so long ago.”

She shook her head. “No, it had to be this way. Don’t you see?”

They were married that fall, and the big house welcomed them, but they kept the cabin on the bay—kept it long after the big electric cars came, and mechanical pianos ground out ragtime tunes for over-dressed girls and vapid-looking boys. Summer cottages began to line the beach. Merry-go-rounds, dance-halls and slot machines rubbed elbows.

Summer visitors got to know ’Toinette and Placide. If, by chance, either was seen working about the cabin, they looked at them askance and said it was only what you could expect from such people . . . it was the peasant coming out in them . . . they *had* to dig ever so often.

Maybe that *was* the reason.

